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Investigating the Glass Handcuff: Gendered Discourses, Occupational Identities, and the Leave-taking Practices of Men in Technical Occupations

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INVESTIGATING THE GLASS HANDCUFF:

GENDERED DISCOURSES, OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITIES, AND THE LEAVE-TAKING PRACTICES OF MEN IN TECHNICAL OCCUPATIONS

by

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INVESTIGATING THE GLASS HANDCUFF

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Investigating the Glass Handcuff: Gendered Discourses, Occupational Identities, and the Leave-Taking Practices of Men in Technical Occupations

Dissertation directed by Associate Professor Timothy Kuhn

Abstract

The intersections of work and nonwork fuel Discourses that beget biases, inequalities, and complications. Discourses of balance and entrepreneurialism are particularly laden with inequalities and contribute to both structural inequalities and biases that inform the everyday practices of individuals. This study explores the ways men in technical occupations invoke these Discourses when making decisions about when and whether to take leaves of absence. Technical occupations are well known to be particularly rife with inequities and simultaneously face a shortage of workers. As such, increasing equality in these occupations would both improve the lives of those working in technical jobs and would allow technical organizations to recruit and retain more workers. I believe that the everyday work–life practices of men in organizations both draw upon and reify the troublesome Discourses of balance and entrepreneurialism.

The findings of the interviews and textual analysis conducted in this dissertation revealed that men in technical occupations view their occupational identities as a "natural" and passionate part of their person, and that they believe they have the opportunity, through their work, to save or change the world. Further, the data revealed that the uniqueness of technical culture complicates leave-taking, that gendered roles and expectations preclude men from taking leaves of absence, and leaves of absence are mitigated by virtual work, vacation time, or quitting for many men in technical occupations. Finally, the data suggested that while most men feel they

are “balanced,” the concept of balance itself is understood in this context as burnout avoidance or completely irrelevant because work and life are so integrated for these men.

Contributions from this study include both theoretical and practical implications, including expanding connections between the Discourse of entrepreneurialism and work–life “choices” and implicating occupational identities as particularly relevant for understanding work–life policies and practices. Moreover, the tensions at the intersections of the Discourses and everyday practice result in a unique form gender inequality where men are linked to their work, unable to take leaves of absence. To explain this situation, I present the metaphor of the *glass handcuff*, which suggests that invisible mechanisms (e.g., entrepreneurialism and occupational identity) lock men into the public, making it difficult for these men to participate fully in the home and also creating biases for women and other caretakers in workplaces. To conclusion, I argue that because the current state of leave policy in the United States is gendered, raced, classed, and ableist, broad reform in leave policy is necessary.

INVESTIGATING THE GLASS HANDCUFF

Dedication

For my children, Brooklynn and Braxton, my sublime motivators, and Kevin, my love.
When people ask me how I did this with a family,
I wonder in turn, how could I have done this without you?
I appreciate your endless energy, love, support and appetites for fun.
You amaze and inspire me every day and
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CONTENTS

"A master in the art of living draws no sharp distinction between his work and his play, his labor and his leisure, his mind and his body, his education and his recreation. He hardly knows which is which. He simply pursues his vision of excellence to whatever he's doing and leaves others to determine whether he is working or playing. To himself, he always appears to be doing both."

Chouinard, 2005

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM OF WORK–LIFE POLICY INEQUALITY

In recent decades, the U.S. workforce has dramatically diversified in response to economic and cultural changes in U.S. society. However, despite these changes, organizations have been slow to create new and meaningful policies to support these new workers. Moreover, in the few organizations that outline policies exist to support a diverse workforce, cultural practice rarely allows for the full implementation of such policies. This project presupposes that achieving equity in U.S. organizations rests not only upon individuals' equal access to equity policies, but also upon individuals' equal use and participation in equity policies and programs.

In exploring organizational policies, this dissertation research focuses on organizational policies and practices around workers' leaves of absence, which, in the United States, are typically gendered in both policy language and practice (Albiston, 2010)[1]. Foundational to my

[1] Focusing on the United States is necessary here in terms of scope and practicality, as leave practices vary widely across different countries, cultures, and geographic locations and because individuals' constructions of leave practices are determined largely by social location.

project is the assumption that gender equity at home and work is desirable, which is supported by both moral and economic reasoning. First, in many ways, equality is the prevailing morally responsible answer to centuries of institutional inequality. I need not belabor this point; feminist projects are concerned with achieving gender justice even as some groups and movements call for a return to traditional, unequal gender roles. Secondly, there are also economic reasons that gender equity is important, which may bear some weight in how the arguments in this project unfold. Some research focuses on the importance of gender equity in the workplace. For example, research suggests that diverse organizations and work teams perform better than more homogeneous teams, and that diverse organizations and teams are more competitive, more innovative, and more successful at reaching their customers or other target audiences when both men and women work together (Ding, Murray & Stuart, 2006; Azoulay, 2007; Stephan & El-Ganainy, 2007; Murray & Graham, 2007). Other studies have demonstrated the benefits of gender parity in the home. For example, Moe and Shandy (2010) found that individuals in households with strong male participation are happier and raise healthier children that households where men participate less. Moreover, a major goal of feminist work is achieving gender parity, which is seen by feminist scholars as not only important, but necessary. As such, the assumption that gender equity is an important and realizable goal is a constant undertone throughout this work

While there are many important organizational practices through which to study gender equity, this dissertation focuses superficially on promoting equity in U.S. organizational workers' leave-taking practices. This first chapter explains the significance of focusing on leave-taking practices by outlining four reasons why this focus is important, including: (1) theoretical motivation (2) the changed demographics of the U.S. workforce and U.S. families; (3) an

increased demand for work–life "balance;" and (4) continual and persistent organizational inequality around a number of social identities, including gender in particular. In this chapter, I also argue that focusing on both men and women is an important move that work–life scholars have not yet fully embraced, but which is essential to understanding and achieving gender equity.

Theoretical Motivation

Feminist theory works to expose and alleviate gender oppression. Feminist research in organizational studies has sought to elevate the status of women and to reduce gender inequality. Oppressive practices in organizations constrain individuals, yet the communicative processes which function to gender Discourses, practices and policies are under theorized. One way that we can work through this problematic is through feminist organizational research, which tries to reduce gender oppression, and to expose the gendered processes and practices in organizations. Reducing gender oppression is a fundamental feminist commitment which carries not only a theoretical motivation, but also ethical and moral obligations.

However, the ways that we theorize gender, work and identity is problematic. Organizational theory is gendered, raced, and classed. Some feminist scholars (e.g. Calas and Smircich, 1992; Buzzanell, 1995; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003) have begun unearthing the flaws and assumptions in organizational theory, but much conceptual work is still necessary in order to understand the ways in which organizations operate in biased ways. Current theory has oversimplified gender oppression in organizations and frequently suggests that gender inequalities can be easily managed by simply adding women to organizations and waiting for transformation. These kinds of analyses fail to acknowledge how gender organizes all parts of our work and nonwork lives. However, by exposing the patriarchal nature of our current

theories, we can advance our knowledge about gender oppression and can ultimately effect change in organizations (Buzzanell, 1995).

Recent scholarship has devoted attention (Mumby, 1998) to the ways in which gender is oppressive to men and women. Everyone is implicated in the biased gender order and thus organizational theory must address the ways in which men experience this gender order at work. If scholars want to understand organizations, we need theories and language that allow relevant analysis. This project thus advances the feminist commitment for gender equality for both men and women by strengthening existing theories about organizational inequality and gender oppression as experienced by women, challenging the assumptions of existing organizational and work-life theories, and by extending theories of organizational inequality as experienced by men.

Work-life theories in particular are operating on assumptions of work, identity, gender, and occupation that are problematic. Most work-life theory is inadequate because it mostly includes only the experiences of women, and neglects the way that gender is always already constructed in light of the Other. We do not merely need new empirical studies to interrogate work-life issues, but rather we need stronger theories that can equip us to understand how gender is constructed and enacted in organization in light of difference. In this project, I seek to problematize the ways that work-life theories have focused on elements that reduce gender to female and work to paid choices of employment. Empirical work seeks relations between these. However, to move beyond limiting understandings of work-life, scholars need a conceptual bridge that allows us to retheorize work, identity, gender, and occupation in more nuanced ways.

Applying a communicative lens to occupational identity and the ways in which it is gendered is one way to build this conceptual bridge. When we theorize gender and occupational identity, we have not always reflected on the ways in which these constructs act intersectionally,

and have not yet fully recognized that these intersections are not simply or neatly understood. Interrogating these intersections is fruitful and helps us to reevaluate the way we theorize gender, "choice," "balance," occupational identity, and other constructs that influence our behaviors in work and nonwork pursuits. Ultimately, through this dissertation, I propose a new metaphor that captures the complexities of these intersections. Introducing new gender theories is one way to empower people to talk about their experiences for which they might not have had the language to describe. Thus by contributing a new metaphor to the conversation of gender, work, entrepreneurialism and identity, this project advances knowledge that is both theoretical and practical.

The Changing Face of U.S. Organizations

First, studying leave-taking practice is important because the U.S. workforce has significantly changed over the past twenty years. Historically, U.S. organizations have been constructed for a specific kind of worker in a specific kind of body. For example, throughout history, the majority of U.S. employees were abled young or middle-aged men with stay-at-home wives (Acker, 1990; Albiston, 2010). These male employees worked shifts of between eight and twelve hours, but when they left work, they left their work at work. This "ideal type" worker was unencumbered by outside obligations; his single obligation was to earn a living. He was flexible, dedicated, and loyal to his company. This worker was always available and completely committed to the company as his priority, and had no real need to or expectation to take a leave of absence except in the rarest of occasions (e.g., funerals or personal injury). In response, organizations developed workplace culture and policies around this particular type of ideal worker.

However, in today's society, workers rarely homogenously fit this "ideal type" because of broad changes that have come to the U.S. workforce (Acker, 1990). As such, in order to better understand organizations and their workforces, it is imperative to consider the ways in which U.S. employees have changed in order for existing theories and assumptions about organizations are to retain their value. The primary changes in today's workforce include increases in: women, dual-income families, single parents, workers with disabilities, aging workers; chronic presenteeism; and the current economic crisis. The subsequent sections briefly describe each of these changes.

Additional Women

A dramatic increase of women into the professional workforce created shockwaves in the demographics of U.S. workers. Six out of ten U.S. American women are currently employed, and these women comprise nearly half of the entire U.S. workforce (Moe & Shandy, 2010). These gendered changes are significant. For example, until the 1940s, 67% of American families included an employed husband and a stay-at-home wife; however, in 2006, only 20% of families were structured in this way (Moe & Shandy, 2010).

Additionally, increases in the educational levels of women have contributed to both the numbers of women in the workplace, and also to a rise in the types of jobs that women can easily attain. For example, currently, women who are between the ages of 25 and 34 earn more college degrees than males of the same age group (Moe & Shandy, 2010). For women, this education leads to more competitive and better paying jobs and has contributed to women's almost numerically equal participation in the American workforce.

As the presence of women in the U.S. workforce increased, so did the need for workers' leaves of absence. Because women employed outside of the home still carry the majority of the

responsibility for childcare and the home (Moe & Shandy, 2010), most women cannot adequately satisfy their employers' historical expectation to be available around the clock. Hochschild (1990) described the tendency for employed women to retain the household responsibility as the "second shift," referring to the household work that primarily women shoulder in addition to their paid employment (see also Halpern & Cheung, 2008). Recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) demonstrate that employed married women with young children assume two thirds of household chores, while their male counterparts assume only the other third. Other research (see, e.g., Moe & Shandy, 2010; Alberts & Trethewey, 2007; Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Prottas, 2002) reveals that employed women spend much more time on childcare and house work than men, with some research documenting that employed women spend approximately 41 hours per week more than employed men on household tasks (approximately 62 hours per week for employed women, as compared to only 21 hours per week for their employed husbands). This heavy work burden can leave many women exhausted, depressed, and physically ill. Employed men also actively resist these household chores. For example, Machung (1989) found that college graduates (now in middle age) would not be comfortable taking on half of the necessary housework, and would not partner with women who expected them to do so.

Moreover, despite the inequitable division of labor at home, leaders in organizations most often underestimate how great the imbalance is and how it disproportionately challenges female employees (Tracy & Rivera, 2009). If these attitudes continue, work–life policies have little chance of achieving actual equality in organizations (Tracy & Rivera, 2009). Thus, the influx of women into the labor market has begun only a slight shift in organizational policy.

Organizational policies typically frame pregnancy and other care obligations as the problems and responsibilities of women alone.

Dual-income Families and Single Parent Families

Today's workforce is also changing due to new family patterns. In particular, new family patterns, including dual-income families and single-parent families, exist due to the increase of women in the workplace and a rising divorce rate, which also heighten the potential need for workers' leaves of absence. These newer family types are increasingly present in American society and may require different organizational accommodations around workers' periodic time away from work.

At present, dual-income families comprise approximately 70% of U.S. American families, and dual-earner families with children are the most common family structure today (Grill 1995–1996; Moe & Shandy, 2010). In these dual-earner families, the mothers' wages account for about 40% of total family income (Glass, 2004). This significant proportion of household income that comes from working mothers is vitally important for the maintenance of the family, and should not be misconstrued with the *pocket change* or vacation funds of middle- and upper-class women's wages in the past. Rather, in coupled families where both adults work, the dual employment is usually because of an economic necessity (Hattery, 2001). For example, Oliver and Shapiro (2006) found that more than one third of married couples require dual earners in order to earn between $25,000 and $50,000 (a living wage). This need for a second worker increases in nonwhite families. For example, two thirds of all African American families require dual-incomes to make a living wage.

Dual-income families are a relatively new phenomenon in American society. In 1970, only one third of married couples classified themselves as dual-income families. However, by

2000, nearly 60% of married couples earned dual wages. These dual-earning couples often jointly work 80 hours, though many couples report working significantly higher hours. In fact, in 2000, nearly 15% of couples jointly worked 100 hours or more per week (Moe & Shandy, 2010). When employed parents have obligations to paid employment and also the responsibility of children and home, times will arise when a leave of absence is necessary. For example, when there is no stay-at-home partner to deal with sick children or parents, one or both workers likely must adjust work schedules (see, e.g., Golden, 2001).

In much the same way as dual-income families, single-parent families are at an increased risk for needing time away from work. These single parents must work, but have fewer safety nets to help them cover care obligations when something goes wrong. Single-parent families are increasingly present in American society, in large part as the result of a growing divorce rate and the rise of never-married parents. Further, the majority of single parent families are comprised of single mothers (Bolzendahl & Olafsdottir, 2008; Albiston, 2010). In 2006, about 30% of families with children were single-parent families, and these families consisted primarily of single women (Albiston, 2010). The increase of single-parent families has left many working mothers as the only source of financial support for their families, and makes work even more critical for their economic survival (Ciabatarri, 2007; Nelson, 2005). As such, single-parent workers may feel a need to exercise their right to leaves of absence more acutely than other workers (e.g., workers from dual-income families), as these single parents may be the only person in their households available to attend to the needs of children.

Workers with Disabilities

In addition to familial structure changes, at present, U.S. workers also are more likely to have a disability than in years past. The number of people with disabilities entering the U.S.

workforce has increased in recent years, in part due to legal reforms promoting education for children with disabilities and improved medical care for people who are disabled. For example, medical advancements (e.g., new treatments) and medical technology (e.g., lighter and more portable wheel chairs) improve the length and quality of life for people with serious illnesses or injuries, so individuals with these conditions regularly enter the work force, and remain in the work force longer. Additionally, because the probability of having a disability increases with age, and because individuals in the baby boomer generation have remained in the workforce, the U.S. workforce has recently aged significantly and, as such, employees with disabilities represent a significant and growing population in the workforce. Statistically, in 2000, 19% of the U.S. population aged 5 and older had a disability, and the majority of working-age men (approximately 60%) and women (approximately 51%) with disabilities were employed (Albiston, 2010). However, the typical structure of work conflicts the ability to live life for people with a variety of disabilities, which may require individuals to take extended or unexpected time away from work.

Aging Workers

The American workforce is also aging, and only recently have the needs of an aging population been accounted for in terms of leaves of absence. The average life expectancy in the United States is rising (currently 80.5 for women and 75.5 for men; Bureau, 2012 of Labor Statistics, 2012). At present, 24.3% of the U.S. population is over 55, and it is expected that by 2030, 20% of the population will over 65 (P. R. Smith, 2004). As the number of older adults in the U.S. population increases, so does the need for elder care: “informal care of the elderly by family and friends” (P. R. Smith, 2004, p. 353). Tracy (2008) noted that providing elder care is like a personal safety net for everyone, and by 2020, 40% of workers are expected to face a need

to provide elder care (P. R. Smith, 2004). However, women are the primary providers of elder care, and this type of work is subject to gendered norms about who can and should conduct such care. For example, U.S. women can expect to spend 18 years caring for elderly relatives (P. R. Smith, 2004). Moreover, Doress-Worters (1994) described “caregiver stress” or "caregiver burden" and examined effects of the elder care role on caregivers and found that women may experience role strain as a result of taking on multiple roles (p. 597). To add to this stress, many workers find themselves in a *caregiving sandwich*, in which they must provide care for both their young children and also for their aging parents (Doress-Worters, 1994). Indeed, P. R. Smith (2004) claimed that elder care induces more stress than childcare for workers because there are more unanticipated caregiving situations. For these reasons, P. R. Smith (2004) argued that elder care is perhaps one of the most important aspects of work–life and, as such, is highly impacted by organizational availability of leaves of absence.

Chronic Presenteeism

In addition to demographic shifts in the U.S. workforce, a new cultural assumption of “chronic presenteeism” pervades, which describes the tendency of U.S. workers to be physically present at work, regardless of other life events, such as illness (Sheridan, 2004, p. 210). Organizations are perpetually attempting to measure workers’ performance, an effort that becomes more difficult when flexible programs and technology enable different patterns for performing work. Continually, the measure of *face time*, which describes the hours employees work at an actual office, is used to determine workers’ performance. Researchers have linked face time to a number of problems, such as organizational pressure for employees to come to work during illness, grief, and other times during which they might stay home. In extreme cases, face time requirements (either real or imagined) can create a culture of organizational

commitment that pressure employees to work 24-hour shifts. For example, Sheridan (2004) found that men, in particular, see no choice but to engage in an unrelenting work schedule in which they can only show their worth by performing their work while others are watching. Although some studies have revealed that performance actually declines as the number of hours employees work increases (R. Simpson, 1998; Heiler, 1998), face time continues to dominate performance assumptions. Such assumptions, however, disproportionately impact women over men, as women's increased responsibilities outside of work have the potential to significantly impact their ability to put in the same hours as men (Sheridan, 2004).

Economic Downturn

In 2008, the United States entered into the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression in the 1930s and early 1940s. Historically, women have responded to economic crises by entering the workforce in hopes of increasing their families' income. Thus the economic problems will likely increase the stress on U.S. workers and will make securing equitable employment conditions more difficult. As Moe and Shandy (2010) explained,

> Economic turbulence leads many employers to enter into a bunker mentality of sorts, and so reentering the workforce during a deep recession becomes even more challenging. With large numbers of jobs destroyed and so many people made redundant, the competition for open positions can be fierce. Women who want to reenter the workforce in times of recession will have a more difficult time negotiating family-friendly policies, as so many people are clamoring for the jobs and are willing to do whatever it takes to keep the jobs they have (p. 159).

Of concern here is that employees may ignore their rights to leaves of absence because they fear that leaving, even for a short time, will make them vulnerable to layoffs. Employees' use of

work–life benefits is dependent, in large part, on whether or not they believe they will be punished for doing so (Tracy & Rivera, 2009; Ashcraft, 1999; Buzzanell & Liu, 2005; S. Lewis, 1997; Peterson & Albrect, 1999). As such, in order to keep their jobs secure, workers frequently forgo their rights to leave, a practice that solidifies the belief that taking leaves of absence is harmful to workers' careers.

There is some evidence that employers are eliminating "frill" benefits and targeting pregnant women and women on flexible work arrangements during layoffs. However, many companies are maintaining flexible scheduling, including part-time work, as a way to save money (Galinsky & Bond, 2009). Although telecommuting and allowing workers to take unpaid leaves of absence save companies money, employees using these policies still feel vulnerable and fear the stigma and bias of working nontraditional schedules. Thus, even when employers maintain existing work–life programs such as flexible scheduling, many employees do not take advantage of these programs in order to avoid marginalization and penalization at work, which is a tendency exacerbated in our current economic climate (Calvert, 2009).

Increased Demand for "Work–Life Balance"

Second, as the workforce has changed, workers' ability to manage work and nonwork pursuits has grown increasingly difficult. In response, many academic fields, including communication, have taken up the study of "work–life balance." Duxbury, Higgins, and Neufeld (1998) defined the work–life management issue as the "challenges people confront when trying to balance the needs and demands of dependents, such as children and the elderly, with the restrictions of time and energy imposed by membership in the paid labour force" (p. 219). Indeed, balancing work and nonwork pursuits is an increasing challenge for U.S. workers. Golden (2000) asserted that "individuals are living more complex internal as well as external

lives, which are potentially richer but also considerably more challenging" (p. 20). Employees arguably work more and more hours, but modern workers, and particularly workers with families, are also in dire need of time away from the workplace. It is ironic that "a greater premium is placed on intimacy between parents and children at the very point that people have less real time to devote to these relationships" (Golden, 2000, p. 12). Fathers feel pressure to be more involved than ever in childrearing just as more mothers are active in the workforce, yet existing organizational policy does not wholly support or even reflect these fundamental attitude shifts about care work.

Problems balancing work and family time are frequently at the forefront of the work–life management Discourse, but researchers have expanded this Discourse to include other nonwork engagements in addition to family. For example, individuals often balance work commitments with education, civic and community service, military service, religious commitments, physical activity, health, care work, volunteer work and personal hobbies. Thus, while the *life* in work–life studies certainly encompasses familial concerns, it also includes other nonwork pursuits. This distinction is particularly relevant when examining leaves of absence, because organizations frequently frame leaves as benefits that only apply for workers with families, despite the multiple potential uses of a leave of absence.

Compounding the need for balance is the fact that current salaries do not wield as much buying power as for previous generations of parents, and thus many modern couples must seek work outside of the home in order to "recreate the same standard of living they enjoyed as children" (Golden, 2001, p. 247). Wieland, Bauer, and Deetz (2009) looked at the role of consumption as further complicating the possibility of a truly balanced life, and call out corporations for colonizing through careerism and a consumption-based quality of life.

Certainly, the combination of these factors makes generating income and enjoying personal time or raising a family a site of tension in organizations that is ripe for analysis. A focus on leave-taking practice and policies is one way to understand the complexities of this tension.

Some work–life scholars have begun studying how work–family conflict affects presence or absence from work. For example, Barling and MacEwen (1991) found that work–family conflict reduced alertness and concentration in workers, and Googins (1991) found that a lack of workplace flexibility correlated with depression in women. As another example, Ross and Mirowsky (1998) and Galisnsky (1994) found that difficulties around childcare negatively influenced the psychological wellbeing of mothers. However, Glass (2004) found that "using work–family policies reduces the job stress and fatigue, turnover, and labor force interruptions that reduce productivity per hour among mothers" (p. 371). Clearly, there are real consequences for understanding how work–life policies, including leave-taking, affect workers.

Despite the seeming benefits of utilizing work–life benefits, Glass (2004) asserted that using work–life policies did not benefit mothers' wages and sometimes prevented wage growth. Glass' findings revealed that the relationship between work–life policy use and negative wage growth was significantly stronger for managers and professionals. Mothers in lower status occupations were less likely to have work–family policies available to them, but were able to use policies more easily when they were available. Additionally, Glass found that working from home even five hours per week had a significant impact on those mothers' wage gain, and that mothers who worked from home at least five hours per week earned on average 27% less than mothers who worked exclusively out of the home. As it currently plays out in most organizational contexts, work–life balance remains elusive both in practice and in theory, particularly in relation to workers' leaves of absence.

Congruent with existing research on work–life in general, research specifically on leaves of absence tends to be scarce, scattered, and difficult to synthesize. For example, Kamerman and Moss (2011) pointed out that

> leave policy, more than many other social policies, is at the intersection of the economic (since it bears on labour force participation and labour market regulation), the social (since it bears on children, families and gender equality), and the demographic (since it bears on fertility). This generates a complex situation of different potential objectives and potential conflicts between objectives, even within the same broad field (p. 9).

As another example, Galtry (2002) noted the "interdisciplinary slippage" (p. 265) of research residing in separate bodies of literature, which may be plagued with inconsistencies in language and style that make it difficult to generate a single body of knowledge about leave-taking. Moreover, discrepancies exist in the way researchers understand leave-taking practices. As one instance of this research discrepancy, some work–life scholars have studied family leave policies, while others study parental leave-taking and medical leave-taking as separate entities (Garand & Monroe, 1995). While all of the aforementioned forms of leave-taking are included under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in the United States, targeting one specific type of leave skews statistics about leaves in general and can make it difficult for researchers to understand current leave-taking policies and practices. Another difficulty in researching leaves is a glut of conflicting data. For example, because FMLA policies only cover 40% of U.S. workers, data often conflicts in regards to workers utilizing FMLA policies and their reasons for doing so, depending on particular organizational and familial characteristics (e.g., organizational size, type of work, and family resources).

Another problematic issue in studying leaves of absence in the United States is the lack of existing research on the topic. A surge of research on the 1993 FMLA was published after the passing of the Act in the mid to late 1990s, but there has been relatively little work on FMLA in recent years and the topic remains relatively unstudied (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999; Kim, 1998). Moreover, Meisenbach, Remke, Buzzanell, and Liu (2008) argued that most policy studies do not accurately present the linguistic behaviors and choices of different stakeholders; instead, most policy work has focused on professional middle-class women. When men are included in leave studies, they tend to be used as a statistical comparison to women (Buzzanell, 2003; Meisenbach et al., 2008). As such, this study attempts to fill this gap in existing literature by addressing multiple forms of FMLA leave-taking practices use specifically by men. Such an endeavor will contribute to gender justice by uncovering opportunities for equity in organizations and participation at home.

Organizational Inequity

Third, continual organizational inequality persists around a number of social identities, including gender in particular. Overt discrimination has declined in the U.S. workplace, although workers still frequently file, and often win, legitimate discrimination lawsuits. More common than overt discrimination are subtler forms of gender-based discrimination, including: the *glass ceiling*, a term describing an invisible barrier which prevents women and other marginalized groups, including people of color, from reaching the upper echelons of organizations; and the *maternal wall*, an invisible and often unconscious bias preventing the upward mobility of working mothers. These discrete biases against women, and especially against women of color, mothers, pregnant women, and women in childbearing years, function as invisible barriers to women's career advancement (I. A. Smith, 2009). These biases

perpetuate the stereotype that women lack the commitment of childless employees, and are damaging to any women who are assumed to potentially have or want a family (Moe & Shandy, 2010). As Albiston (2010) explained

> mothers earn less than men, whether or not those men have children; mothers also earn less than women who do not have children. These wage penalties remain even after controlling for factors that might differentiate mothers and nonmothers, such as human capital investments, part-time employment, the mother-friendly characteristics of jobs held by mothers, and other important differences in the characteristics, skills, and behaviors of mothers and nonmothers (p. 66).

Discrimination claims based on the *maternal wall* are on the rise. For example, Calvert (2009) explained that family responsibilities discrimination (FRD), also called caregiver discrimination, occurs when employees are discriminated against based on their family caregiving responsibilities. Claims of FRD comprise a substantial portion of work–life lawsuits filed. FRD manifests itself in many ways, including when organizations: refuse to hire pregnant women; resist promoting mothers of young children; punish male employees for taking time off to care for their children; and give unwarranted negative evaluations to employees who take leave to care for aging parents. FRD is typically caused by unexamined bias about how "employees with family caregiving responsibilities will or should act" (Calvert, 2009, p. 3). FRD represents one example of how organizational assumptions about how employees might or should act contribute to employers' unconscious discriminatory practices.

Despite these challenges, in recent years, equality in the workplace has improved in some ways. At present, men and women are competitive in terms of pay for similar jobs with similar hours during the first two years of their careers. Childless men and women remain fairly wage

comparable over the term of their careers. This wage competitiveness is surprising, considering that, on a wide scale, women earn less than men and are far less likely to hold leadership positions at work. The existence of comparable wages also suggests that the gender wage gap exists, at least in part, because of women's willingness to change their work structures and patterns, including by taking leaves of absence, in order to manage their work and nonwork obligations (Moe & Shandy, 2010).

Between the years of 1997 and 2005, many college-educated married women began *opting out*, or leaving the paid workforce in favor of marriage and child rearing (Moe & Shandy, 2010). This so-called "opt out revolution" (Belkin, 2003) does not reflect the practices of the majority of mothers; rather, it is a popular press construction describing the practices of a few elite women (J. Simpson & Kirby, 2006). Most women who leave the paid work force do not classify their decision as opting out; instead, they cite the economic impossibility of paying for childcare. Kuhn (2006b) explained that existing demographics did not support the notion of an opt-out revolution, as most women were actively seeking work. Despite the fact that much research has successfully debunked the myth of the "opt out revolution," Moe and Shandy (2010) argued that the myth still provides insight on the struggles that many women face in trying to balance work and life. They explained,

> Women are motivated to leave or to downsize their careers by a range of factors, including cultural expectations about parenthood, limited available child care options, and the desire to relieve stress for their families and for themselves. Women want to spend time with their children and spouse, and a lack of flexible work options has forced many to choose resigning their jobs altogether or embarking on a "mommy track" (Moe & Shandy, 2010, p. 5)

Although there are a multitude of reasons that might incite women to completely leave the workplace, one critical factor appears to be the lack of organizational support for balancing work and family, including policies on leave-taking (cites). As such, and also because leaving the workforce completely has serious negative implications for a woman's future earning capacity, it is critical for scholars to study why leave policies do not function to keep these women employed.

Organizational Equity and Leaves of Absence

Some scholars have started attending to leave policy and practice as a particularly relevant point in organizational equity (see, e.g., Ashcraft, 1999; Buzzanell, 2003; Martin, 1990; Kirby & Krone, 2002). For example, Kim (1998) explained that

> family leave policy introduces gender equality issues underscoring the fact that work–family conflict is not only a woman's issue but also a man's issue . . . If, however, traditional role bias and stereotypes are pervasive in organizations, the goals of family leave benefits for employees might be distorted during the policy implementation process (p. 80).

Although the United States has made some progress in designing laws about leave policies, there are still far too many implementation problems to observe much progress. Glass (2004) explained that employees do not actually use leave policies because they have internalized cultural and organizational messages that workers who use leave policies are uncommitted and will not advance. Most employees can relate stories of colleagues or acquaintances who have suffered as a result of taking a leave of absence. Indeed, Schultz (2007) claimed that

> a major contribution of work and family research to date is the general finding that workers often do not take advantage of work and family policies out of fear that their use signals a lack of commitment to a job or an employer. (p. 5)

As such, studying the cultural Discourses about leave-taking is important if leave policies are to be implemented. As Albiston (2010) explained

> understanding what FMLA rights will mean requires examining how workers come to comprehend and claim their rights, especially when they encounter conflict over taking leave. In addition, workers do not mobilize their rights in a cultural vacuum. FMLA rights remain embedded within existing power relations, institutions, and culture, including deeply entrenched beliefs and practices associated with work, gender, and disability. (p. ix)

Untangling how these factors work together to suppress equity progress is a central goal of this dissertation. Of particular interest in this study is understanding how these cultural Discourses inform men.

Why Men in Technical Occupations?

In much work–life research, and in feminist work in particular, the study and resulting discussions about equity focus largely on *women's* experiences. People frequently characterize equity as a "women's" movement, despite the necessity for organizational reform to involve men. Achieving gender equity would include an improvement in the lives of both women *and* men (Tracy & Rivera, 2009). Because little existing literature focuses on both gender equity and men's experience with work–life balance, this dissertation examines how *men* draw on gendered Discourses when making work–life balance "choices," including taking leave.

There has been very little scholarly attention to men in work–life scholarship (see, e.g., Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, and Buzzanell & Turner, 2003, for notable exceptions). When men are included in work–life studies, however, researchers rarely draw connections between the constructs of gender, family, and work, and typically do not articulate how men's experiences with these constructs affect women, particularly as men continually inhabit gatekeeping roles that shape organizational culture, policy, and practice (Tracy & Rivera, 2009). Boren and Johnson (2008) suspected that societal norms and the blurring of private and public life have shifted perspectives on which employees should take leave. They concluded that more research on paternity leave initiatives is necessary for understanding both if and how leaves are socially acceptable for men in organizations. As such, addressing this lack of scholarly attention will be one contribution of this project.

In addition to the lack of attention to men in work–life scholarship, there are two important reasons to study men's leave-taking practices. First, gender equity is impossible to achieve unless research examines the perspectives of both men and women. Because women's experiences are *always* constructed in relation to men's experiences, gender parity is impossible unless we understand how changes in women's practices affect men and vice versa. Second, a growing body of literature and a number of social movements (e.g., President Obama's President's Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative and the antifeminist Father's Rights movement) suggest that men either wish to be or should be spending more time at home. Thus, researchers should explore how men make sense of this pressure, particularly in relation to men's assumed breadwinner role, and how that pressure may impact the health of men, and the lives of their families, including women, children, and ageing parents, who may need care.

Gender is Constructed Relationally

As the dual-earner family has become the most representative model of U.S. families, both breadwinner and caregiver roles require revision. The position of women and men, in the home and at work, are linked. Researchers cannot consider women's employment in isolation; rather, women's employment must be considered in relation to men's participation at home (Kamerman & Moss, 2011). As Callister and Galtry (2006) claimed, in order

> for gender equity to occur both in the labour market and the home, one, or preferably both, of the following needs to take place:
>
> 1. Women need to increase their employment tenure and their lifetime hours of paid work and, related to both of these, their yearly and lifetime earnings from paid work.
> 2. Men need to undertake an equal share of childcare and household work. This will generally require a reduction in their paid work hours. (p. 44)

Gender equality at work and home requires changes in the ways men participate in the home, including increasing responsibilities in childcare and domestic work. Gender equality is only possible if workplace expectations change, and in particular, expectations of organizational face time based on an outdated ideal type of worker.

However helpful men's participation in leave-taking would be, most men feel they cannot, should not, or would not take leave (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999). Wayne and Cordeiro (2003) pointed out that men do not use family leave benefits because they often fear that by doing so they will be viewed by employers as uncommitted and, as a result, might suffer career penalties. Indeed, gendered organizational culture theory (Acker, 1990) suggests that all leave-takers will be penalized, regardless of their gender, and that people are penalized whenever their

actions violate expected gender roles. Wayne and Cordeiro (2003) studied perceptions about good organizational citizenship and found that men who took leave for birth or eldercare were, in fact, perceived as more selfish than men who did not take any leave or women who took leave for the same reasons. Furthermore, Albiston (2010) described that "men who took parental leave are perceived to be less likely to help their coworkers, be punctual, work overtime, or have good attendance than men who did not take parental leave, even when performance was held constant" (p. xi). Researchers should take these findings seriously, and especially because organizational citizenship behaviors and perceptions of these behaviors are often tied to workers' salary increases (cites).

Apparently, men are well aware of the penalties they might face for taking leave. For example, in 1993, the Bureau of National Affairs found that only 7% of men would take twelve weeks of parental leave upon the birth or adoption of a child (Grill, 1995–1996). As another example, current data suggests that 23% men do take time off to care for new children, but that these men take significantly less than the possible twelve weeks (American Association of University Women, 2012).

These statistics are a particularly discouraging in light of the recent push for fathers to be more involved in their children's lives. Sheridan (2004) asserted that professional men face a dilemma due to the increasing Discourse about changing roles for fathers without concomitant changes in the workplace to allow these men to take up their new roles. As Moe and Shandy (2010) described,

> men, too, can face a so-called maternal wall with regard to their parental responsibilities. Likewise, even those who don't have children may have living parents, and the care needs of that generation are growing rapidly. These issues are not only women's issues.

> Rather, anyone with care giving responsibilities, whether for an aging parent, an ailing family member, or a child, can face many of the same obstacles. Indeed the 'maternal wall' can be construed more broadly as a 'caregiver wall (p. 60).

Modern dads are more involved in parenting than previous generations. For example, the total hours married fathers spend with their children has increased to 33 hours per week, the highest amount since the industrial revolution. Further, many dads are starting to articulate their need for more time at home in the workplace (Moe & Shandy, 2010; Chethik, 2006). This increased parental presence has positive outcomes for men, including better marriages and improved relationships with their children (Golden, 2007). As another example, fathers provide care for approximately 20% of preschool children while their mothers are at work. These families typically coordinate their work schedules so that they do not work the same hours and thus reduce the amount of time their children are in the care of others (Moe & Shandy, 2010). However, despite fathers' increased participation in childcare, men have only realized minimal structural and/or cultural changes in the workplace. If men are increasing the amount of time spent on care work, they too will likely face higher levels of work–life conflict.

Care Work Support

Moe and Shandy (2010) claimed that women engage in a number of techniques to help facilitate the balance between their paid work and their family, including: sequencing family and career, reducing work hours, relinquishing advancement opportunities at work, restructuring nonwork time, living in family-friendly communities, and using flexible work arrangements. However, they did not mention extending a partner's contribution at home as a strategy for balance. This tendency may explain why women with partners attempt to "do it all" themselves. Indeed, Bornstein (2000–2001) asserted that "men need to take leave in order both to alleviate

the unequal burden of childcare on their female partners and [also] to transform workplace norms about the traditional worker" (p. 122). Leave-taking makes financial sense for men to take a share in childcare because other childcare options are incredibly expensive, ranging, on average, from $4,000 to 15,000 a year *per child*. Further, high quality childcare is not readily available, in that there is a significant shortage of available care spaces for children s compared to the number of children with working parents. Thus, work policies and schedules that do not allow men to contribute to care work are problematic.

The occupational contexts for this study include computer science and engineering. These technical careers have the reputation of being especially challenging sites for workers to balance work and life, and particularly for women working in these fields (Hewlett et al., 2008). Technical organizations are notoriously gendered and face a multitude of equity difficulties (see, e.g., Jorgenson, 2002; Ashcraft & Blithe, 2009). This dissertation focuses on computer science and engineering, in particular, because these areas are notably inequitable by race, gender, ability, and parental status, and reflect this inequality in easily measurable ways (e.g., salaries and numerical representation, particularly in higher rank positions). As such, these occupations are in serious need of parity efforts.

For example, computing is one of the fastest growing professions, yet because of difficulties entering and maintaining a career in computing, women are losing interest in this profession. In 2001, 58,773 SAT test takers indicated that they intended to major in computing and information sciences, as compared to only 33,965 SAT test takers indicating the same six years later in 2007. As such, the National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT, 2010) estimates that although 1.4 million computer specialist job openings are

expected U.S. by 2018, there will not be enough graduates to fill these positions. In 2008, women comprised only 25% of U.S. professional computing-related occupations.

Women from minority groups are even less likely to work in computer-related positions. In 2010, Only 28% of computer scientists were female, however only 3% were female and African American, only 3% were female and Asian, and only 1% were female and Latina (NCWIT, 2010). These numbers are shockingly low.

Additionally, gender inequity is further exacerbated in upper leadership positions in technical companies. For instance, women hold only 11% of corporate officer positions at Fortune 500 technology companies. Of the 198 companies with at least $6 billion in revenue, only 5 employed female CEOs, and none of the 22 technology companies fitting this revenue criterion employed female CEOs. Further, there is a significant salary gap between men and women in technical occupations. In employees' first years of employment in a technical career, the salary difference between men and women is low, ranging from 2 to 5%; however, after 15 years, the gap increases to over 11% (Ashcraft & Blithe, 2009). Because careers in technology, and, in particular, computing, are still struggling to even introduce gender equity in numbers, it is a good context from which to start working toward gender parity.

Another reason that technical organizations make an excellent context from which to study leave-taking practice is that technical workers—including both men and women—believe that being family-oriented is not a characteristic that equates to success in technology. Many midlevel women report experiencing a "family penalty" or a "motherhood assumption," where supervisors assign them less important and fewer high-visibility tasks. These perceived penalties act as real barriers to women's career advancement. Many men also experience family responsibilities as problematic for advancement. For example, although more than 60% of

technical workers viewed themselves as family oriented, a mere 7% believed that successful technologists are family-oriented. Additionally, work–life or work–family issues are critically important for many technical workers. However, although 74% of technical women say they love their jobs, 56% quit during their "midlevel" (10–20 years of experience), which is more than double the rate for men. In 2003, only one third of women with computer science degrees were still employed in a STEM job two years after graduation. Research into why women leave technology has revealed that balancing work and family is too difficult for many female works employed in technology careers (Ashcraft & Blithe, 2009).

Further, midlevel technical workers claimed that they desired flexible work schedules, but that informal company practices (as opposed to formal company policies) made securing a flexible schedule difficult. Informal comments or direct authority from managers made using flexible schedule options nearly impossible. For example, Ashcraft & Blithe (2009) found that employees frequently implied that workers (including both men and women) who took advantage of flexible scheduling policies had been given special treatment. Exploring this context is critical both for women and men in technical careers, as flexible scheduling and leave-taking (both typically grouped under the umbrella of "family-friendly" or "work–life" policies) frequently are promoted or frowned upon in similar ways in organizations.

Research Contributions

Contributions from this study include both theoretical and practical implications. First, this study strengthens the argument that men must play an integral role in gender reform. Beyond their roles as gatekeepers and mentors, men are also as workers who would benefit from culturally accepted leave policies. A recent study by the Galinsky, Aumann, Bond, and Family–Work Institute (2009), for example, revealed that men are reporting increased levels of work–life

conflict. Understanding why men do or do not take leaves of absences thus, is critical on two levels: first, as a means for men to achieve equity in their own right as workers constrained by gendered Discourses, and second, because women can never safely take leaves of absences in their organizations if men do not also take leaves of absences.

Gender functions as a dialectic and understanding masculine practices are essential for broad-scale emancipation. Alvesson and Willmott (1992) defined emancipation as "the process through which individuals and groups become freed from repressive social and ideological conditions, in particular those that place socially unnecessary restrictions upon the development and articulation of human consciousness" (p. 432). While the concept of emancipation has been critiqued as unrealistic, utopian, and essentialist, individuals can begin to undermine power imbalances by reconceptualizing emancipation as *microemancipation*, or the everyday activities and techniques that facilitate resistance (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). Emancipation, thus, is an important process by which workers can begin to move beyond organizational colonization of the personal and achieve equitable organizational status.

Second, this study extends the connection between Discourse and work–life "choices." In particular, workers evoke Discourses of entrepreneurialism and balance in complex ways at the intersections of work and nonwork. Additionally, occupational Discourses that shape occupational identities are revealed as highly important in the ways that work–life policies and practices are understood in everyday life. To explicate the ways that these Discourses shape and are shaped by work–life practice, in this dissertation I present a new metaphor, *the glass handcuff*, which describes invisible mechanisms that keep men locked into their work. By employing this metaphor, this research begins to capture the many invisible constraints that keep men locked into work and prevent them from participating fully at home. There are a number of

complications that arise from the glass handcuff phenomenon, such as the maintenance of structural workplace biases against women and other caretakers in workplaces. As such, I ultimately argue for reforming existing leave policy, because in its current state, leave policy in the United States is gendered, raced, classed, and ableist.

Overview of the Dissertation

Organization, gender, and identity are interwoven in a complex relationship where each inevitably shapes, and is shaped, by the other. My scholarship is grounded in the assumption that these are largely discursive constructions, laden with political implications, that, when institutionalized, frequently result in gender inequity. At the heart of my work, however, is the belief that gender equity in organizations is possible. As such, this dissertation represents both (1) an organizational communication study that analyzes the way that Discourses have consequential effects on people in organizations, and (2) a feminist study that seeks to promote equity by actively deconstructing hidden biases and assumptions in Discourse.

One way to accomplish this kind of blended study is to analyze the use of gendered Discourses in everyday practice. I use the word "Discourse" in this study to describe areas in which meaning is understood as fixed but which might be contested by individuals. Discourses are broad social narratives about people, objects and events that are *temporarily* fixed, elastic, predictable, coherent, conflicting, abstract, and multiple. Discourses are visible in workplaces as images of possible subject positions and in the disciplining of outliers. Discourses supply individuals with the roles and scripts used to act out identity performances (Ashcraft & Flores, 2000; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). Developed from a Foucauldian framework of power and control, Discourse illuminates how people's experiences, including gender, are constituted by the discursively available social categories through the normalization of ways of thinking, feeling,

and acting (see Frazer, 1990, as cited in Davies & Harre, 1990). However because the available social categories and structures are discursive, potential exists for individuals to undo or redo these forms through a reimagining of work-life. Moreover, grounding this work in Discourse enables me to highlight how work–life policies and practices are configured in one particular way, and how they hold the potential for change. Thus a discursive perspective serves as a tool for undoing biased logics that structure our "choices."

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters, including this first chapter. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework that guides this study. Drawing on feminist standpoint theory, I draw out the ways in which such an epistemology can illuminate how organizations are structurally biased for particular workers at the expense of others. Integral to this project is identity, particularly occupational identity, which acts as the crux of work–life practice and guiding Discourses.

Chapter 3 reviews recent scholarship in work–life, in addition to the history and current status of leave policy and practice. They myriad of leave practice research from multiple fields is condensed so that major arguments across fields are presented.

Chapter 4 provides information about the methodological choices guiding this study. I first outline how qualitative research and feminist research can complement each other, even as I have to negotiate some tension between the two methodologies. I describe the ways I proceeded to conduct this feminist discursive analysis of men in technical occupations, including a description of my data collection through popular press profiles and interviews of men in technical occupations. Methods of analysis and researcher positionality are also discussed.

Chapter 5 presents the overarching Discourses identified in popular press autobiographies and biographies that illuminate a framework for understanding the context of technical

occupations and the ways that work–life policies are implicated. Chapter 5 provides a milieu that guides the practices of individual workers in technical occupations and builds a macro Discourse from which people make everyday decisions.

Chapter 6 both examines the Discourses men in technical occupations draw upon to make their work–life choices and also explains some discursive resources men use to talk about work and nonwork pursuits. Excerpts from interviews reveal how occupational Discourses have been naturalized in such extreme ways that occupational identities often eclipse other identities. I describe how technical occupations evoke such passion that the work–life distinction is deemed irrelevant, and the ways in which technical occupations are presented as uniquely exempt from leave-taking as a common practice. In addition, in this chapter I argue that typical notions of balance should be examined as balance itself depends upon occupational identities.

Finally, Chapter 7 discusses some implications from the study, including both theoretical considerations and practical applications. These implications include the introduction of the *glass handcuff* metaphor as a means to capture the ways that occupational Discourses, occupational identities, and the Discourse of entrepreneurialism contribute to gendered leave-taking practice. Lastly, I conclude the dissertation with an argument that leave policy in the U.S. requires reform.

CHAPTER 2

INTERLACING THEORIES FOR WORK–LIFE

Unraveling structural inequalities in work–life policies and practices is a complex endeavor, and this next chapter conceptually laces three theoretical areas that are relevant to this study: feminist standpoint epistemology, entrepreneurialism, and theories of identity. First, a feminist standpoint epistemology illuminates how organizations are structurally biased, which advantages some workers at the expense of others. Second, the concept of entrepreneurialism provides insight into the pressures that individuals both contribute to and are subjected to in (organizational) life. Finally, theories about identity and occupational identity in particular, provide a link between overarching Discourses and everyday practice. Lacing these three approaches provides rich new material to explore in work–life communication and lays the groundwork for meaningful discursive analysis, which is introduced in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist standpoint theory assumes that social location produces particular worldviews or narratives and that, historically, some social locations have been systematically othered and excluded from the matrix of knowledge construction (see, e.g., Sprague & Hayes, 2000; Harding, 1998; Bullis, 1993; Lugones & Spelman, 1983). While feminism is a response to the problem of women's historical and constant oppression and exclusion, feminist standpoint theory rejects the essential category of "woman" and instead seeks to understand how the intersection of multiple social identities produces different worldviews. Standpoints are not simple categories; rather, standpoints are comprised through a combination of influences, resources, material and symbolic realities, and contexts that construct understanding through experience (Sprague & Hayes, 2000;

B. Allen, 1998). It is problematic to assume the standpoint of a "woman" as an essential category. Instead, it is important to consider how other aspects of social influence create a variety of gender identities over time.

Feminist standpoint theory gives credence to intersectionality, or the way that gender and other factors (e.g., race, sexuality, class, (dis)ability, and nationality) interact to create different subjectivities. All too frequently, differences—especially among women—are silenced by essentialism. However, different social locations produce worldviews that are strikingly different and that bring forth different responses. For example, Friedan's (1962) "problem that has no name," which refers to middle- to upper-class white women's boredom and even imprisonment as housewives, was a problem only for wealthy white women. Women of color and working class women do not experience the same kind of "problem," because working class women have always worked. Thus, standpoint theory encourages feminisms so that women's different identities can be accounted for in talk about "women's" issues. This "interlocking nature of oppression" (Collins, 1986, p. S19) accounts for the way that oppression works through intersections of social identity—and particularly through race, gender, and class—to strike some women (e.g., women of color and low-income women) so that these women experience simultaneous oppression as women, as individuals of color, and as individuals of the working class. First recognizing these simultaneous instances of oppression and then unlocking the occurrence of such simultaneous oppression requires constant critical examination of knowledge, policies, institutions, and organizations which were designed for and by individuals with the dominant standpoint and social location (i.e., white, heterosexual, abled, wealthy men).

From a feminist standpoint perspective, reform suggestions for FMLA, for example, must consider not only *women's* needs for a supportive policy, but, more specifically, must consider

what diverse women need. For instance, women with disabilities might need more time, whereas single mothers might need more financial support, and lesbian mothers might need reformed definitions of family. Any kind of discussion or effort to improve policies must account for a variety of social locations, lest it risk the continual submission to dominant groups and assumptions that have marginalized particular people throughout history. As Sprague and Hayes (2000) argued,

> A first step in the evaluation of community and institutional policies should be to turn the tables on the old implementation of the normal/other distinction. Let us decenter our idea of normal and evaluate policy and practices also from the standpoint of people who do not drive, are not comfortable with counting money, learn at radically different paces in a wide variety of styles, do not read, do use a wheel chair, do push a stroller, and/or are personally responsible for the care of others. (p. 690–691)

Equality is only possible when multiple standpoints and social locations are included in the way knowledge and policies are determined.

Feminist standpoint theory makes space for silenced voices, which allows not only for understanding and changing existing dominant practice, but also for producing socially responsible Discourse (Bullis, 1993). Thus, this dissertation embraces the assumptions of feminist standpoint theory, particularly as a lens through which to analyze dominant Discourses. In doing so, I assume that it is through Discourse that society's institutions, including gender itself, are constituted. Specifically, I seek to more deeply understand men's leave-taking practices through this discursive lens, with the express purpose to effect social change.

This discursive lens is important to both the theoretical foundation and methodological practice of my dissertation. Theoretically, standpoint theory requires the identification of

unchallenged dominant Discourses by continually asking *when*, *how*, and *whose* standpoints are represented in discursive practices, formations, policies, and organizations. Discourses both shape and are shaped by everyday behaviors, in that they are overarching understandings of reality that produce rules that guide action. Discourses, however, are always political, and must be analyzed to uncover how they work as powerful distributors of inequality. Thus, methodologically, studying Discourses requires attention to discursive practices, as the ways in which humans engage with Discourses in their everyday lives that shape reality. Jorgenson (2002) noted that for feminists working with Discourse, "of particular interest is how, in the learning and use of discursive practices, women and members of other marginalized groups take up and are placed in locations from which they interpret their lives" (p. 358). Thus all knowledge and all identities are the political productions of Discourse.

Taking a standpoint feminist epistemology, then, suggests that my perspective as a researcher is necessarily guided by my own social location. In essence, this means that from a standpoint perspective, this dissertation (and all dissertations), are always political and shaped by the researcher's positionality, which is shaped by social location and experience to produce a subjective view on all phases of this research. The intersections I have selected for this study and the conceptual framework from which I operate undoubtedly work to create the outcomes of this study. Social location cannot be overlooked. This project has developed from my own experiences in a particular body at a particular point in time and thus reflects my personal standpoint.

In this study, standpoint feminism is employed to interrogate the implied neutrality of leave policies and practices as neutrally organized processes and suggests that instead, preexisting social and cultural practices are (re)produced in the gendered power relations around

leave policy. As discursively constructed phenomena, leave-taking policies are thus open for renegotiation and transformation, despite the seemingly hardened or naturalness of such policies (Buzzanell & Liu, 2005). Despite this transformative potential, studies about leaves of absence are relatively sparse.

To apply standpoint feminism to men's experiences requires care. Because men have experienced extensive privilege in organizations and elsewhere, to position them as individuals with marginalized standpoints requires careful consideration. It is not my purpose here to suggest that men are oppressed in organizations. Rather, it is that in the context of leaves of absence and other work-life policies, men are frequently marginalized. As such, applying standpoint theory to men's experiences is a useful way to shed light on leave policy inequality. As hooks (1995) explained, lived experience in a marginalized social location is central for completely understanding existing power structures. She argued that such perspectives provided unique and valuable contributions that are not possible for others to explicate. Clearly hooks was not talking about men, particularly privileged white men, however the notion that power structures are illuminated from the margins is a valuable tool that can help shed light on the (hidden) power structures of leaves of absence and other work-life policies. Thus I apply standpoint theory here with caution and care, as a means to understand a particular facet of organizational life in which men are frequently marginalized.

In conclusion, this section outlined how feminist standpoint theory functions as a theoretical framework to study leave policies and practices. Such an approach allows for insightful analysis of Discourse and a reimagining of structures and policies in more equitable terms. However, in order to fully comprehend the difficulties of such a reimagination, it is necessary to expand the Discourse of entrepreneurialism, in that entrepreneurialism provides a

context for which a reimagining would occur. As such, in the next section of this chapter, I trace the history and impact of entrepreneurialism.

Entrepreneurialism

Entrepreneurial Discourse functions to create the preferred subject positions of autonomous, consensual individuals who are responsible for their own self-surveillance and success. The ideal entrepreneurial worker is able to self-monitor, work long hours, and, in general, do "whatever it takes" to succeed and achieve in the workplace and at home. These "do-it-yourself "or "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentalities are particular Western constructions that situate the accomplishment of work and career as the responsibility of the worker.

Organizational studies has a long tradition of identifying and analyzing power and control in organizations (see, e.g., Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979; Barker, 1993; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985; Kondo, 1990; and Fleming & Spicer, 2007). However, because processes of control in organizations are increasingly evolving and elusive, deconstructing these seemingly invisible mechanisms of control is important. Moreover, while the rise of entrepreneurialism is consistently posited as enlightened and empowering by mass-market texts, it is the organizations that consistently benefit, rather than individual workers. This notion of control is pervasive and enduring, and requires further scholarship if scholars are to fully understand, overcome, or work within its confines.

Entrepreneurialism is power via subjectification (Fleming & Spicer, 2007), which explains how individuals manage themselves and internalize organizational decisions, for example. The focus is on the constitution of the individual him/herself. As entrepreneurialism is a theoretical foundation of this dissertation, the work of Michel Foucault (1963/1998; 1977;

1980; 1982) is extremely useful in analyzing this kind of power. Foucault claimed that power defines the conditions of possibility that underscore how individuals experience themselves as people, or their *potential self.* The very possibility of a potential self is *produced for* individuals, even as people believe we come to a self "naturally." To illustrate these concepts, Foucault examined social institutions (e.g., psychiatry, medicine, and the prison system) to understand the particular ways in which institutional Discourses impact the subject positions, actions, attitudes, learning, and talk of everyday life.

Some researchers (e.g., Dean, 1999, and Newton, 1998) have argued that scholars use Foucault's work in their own ways and, thus, researchers drawing on Foucault's ideas should use caution when claiming a purely Foucauldian position. However, the vast majority of research on entrepreneurialism draws largely on Foucault. The Discourse of entrepreneurialism is a particularly salient area for critique because it explicitly aligns individual "choice" with organizational benefit. Entrepreneurialism is regularly deeply internalized and, as such, is a nearly invisible means of power and control. For this reason, it is critical for researchers to engage in continued analysis and critique of entrepreneurialism and of the ways in which entrepreneurialism subjectifies workers.

There is some ambiguity and overlap in the way scholars talk about entrepreneurialism, entrepreneurs and enterprise. Frequently, entrepreneurialism and enterprise culture are used synonymously. Cameron (2007) discussed enterprise culture as the push to make business undertakings as the model for all undertakings, such that governments, schools, and other public institutions are run like businesses. Under enterprise, customer service is critical. A serious focus on consumers characterizes enterprise management so that every employee answers to "a customer" in some way. Enterprising employees are made responsible for their own behavior-

successes or failures. Du Gay (1996) explained that the enterprising vision of excellence provides a novel image of the worker, positioning him/her as entrepreneurial. He claimed that the term 'entrepreneur' no longer simply implied the founder of an independent business venture; rather, it had traversed its traditional limits and now referred to the application of 'entrepreneurial principles to the traditional corporation, creating a marriage between entrepreneurial creativity and corporate discipline, cooperation and teamwork'. This "intrapreneurial" or "post-entrepreneurial" (because it takes entrepreneurship a stage further) revolution therefore provides the possibility for every member of an organization to express individual initiative and to develop fully his or her potential in the service of the corporation. In effect, enterprising excellence offers the individual the opportunity to feel in business for oneself inside the modern corporation and therefore the all important experience of ownership is implied. As such, the term "entrepreneur" may or may not be connected to a person who has founded his or her own business. For my purposes, I use "entrepreneurialism" to talk about entrepreneurial behavior (not connected to actually owning a business), "entrepreneur" to talk about individuals who have started their own business, and "enterprise culture" to talk about the phenomenon of turning all endeavors into business endeavors.

Entrepreneurialism contributes to the current ways in which individuals monitor themselves, including their bodies, souls, thoughts, and how they conduct self-inspection, self-problematization, self-monitoring, body alteration, and even therapy. Across these areas, scholars can see substantial changes in human interaction that directly link to entrepreneurialist thought. In particular, according to Rose (1989), the contemporary self is different from historical conceptions of self in three main ways: (1) personal and subjective capacities of citizens have been incorporated into the scope and aspirations of public powers, (2) the

management of subjectivity is a primary task for organizations, and (3) the birth of the expertise of subjectivity has produced subsequent roles (e.g., probation officers, life coaches, and social workers).

The entrepreneurial self can be traced to World War I, when the U.S. military began intelligence-testing soldiers during recruitment and, thus, started the routine segregation of individuals as either competent or incompetent. Additionally, the military started registering people by skill set as a means for military strategists to consider individuals' capacities when planning strategy. As such, this time in history was one of the first noted instances of organizations using individual workers' skills as a means of maximizing organizational production, profit, and outcome. World War I had one other lingering effect on the development of entrepreneurialism: the diagnosis of shell shock and the following psychological inquiry into "mental health," which could be improved with the proper work and life conditions. This is perhaps an early move to frame work–life as a concern of the organization.

During World War II the concept of individual mental health was extended to the health of groups. Morale became a serious concern for the military, which attempted to control the mental wellbeing of the troops. The notion that fatigue hindered performance sparked efforts to control how frequently and how hard individuals worked, and also introduced the idea of time away from work. These improvements in work structure laid the foundation for other organizational contexts to study, track, and eventually dictate the work–life issues of organizational members.

In later years, scientific management taught managers to control production by coordinating individual skills. For example, Taylorism was part of a new management style during this time that sought to manage individuals according to their particular differences (e.g.,

individual strengths and weaknesses). In response, individuals began to act upon the internal organization's behalf, "enterprising" themselves so that they could gain mobility within the organization according to their "type". This move is critical in the development of entrepreneurialism as it pertains to work–life, in that when employees are enterprised so that they are in charge of their own successes and failures, work–life actions become organizational "choices" that are made to either benefit or hinder employees. The employee is then responsible for making the "correct" choices that will enable upward mobility in the organization. As such, becoming a specific "type" of employee dictates which life "choices" outside of work are available for workers to enjoy.

By the 1960s, managers started to take on the role of advisor for employees who could manage their own wellbeing. In this latest phase of entrepreneurial development, workers not only selected their work–life "choices" from a predetermined menu, but they also received training, guidance, and a plethora of organizational materials to help them learn to successfully "balance" what was deemed important for them. This is not to say that employees completely lacked autonomy; rather, the invisible hand of entrepreneurialism already decided specific options that were or were not available for specific kinds of workers. When employees felt tension around multiple roles, it was—and remains today—easily ascribed to mismanagement in work–life decisions.

However, the entrepreneurial ideal is, in practice, impossible for employees to achieve (Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). The individual success required to adopt the entrepreneurial identity is a myth that is contingent on many factors (e.g., race, class, and age). Put simply, all workers do not have the same opportunities, and the "choices" available to workers are predetermined and largely reflect race, class, age, abilities, and other marginalizing factors. By

assuming that all workers could potentially embody the entrepreneurial ideal, organizations overlook the power dynamics that make individual possibilities for self-reliance *different*. For example, while the youthful entrepreneurial ideal has no family, never tires, never stops gaining new skills, and never stops innovating, no actual worker could maintain this ideal *forever*, and some individuals cannot maintain it *ever*. As such, without critical examination of the ways in which entrepreneurialist Discourse presents possibilities that are *impossibilities,* employees risk succumbing to the idea that "choice" is a phenomenon that we can control.

Failure to embody the entrepreneurialist ideal is a probability for most workers. Both male and female workers experience misrecognition, for example, but Nadesan and Trethewey (2000) argued that the failure is more pronounced for women, who must try to mold both their minds and bodies to a masculinized patriarchal symbolic order. However impossible, individuals attempt to emulate the entrepreneurial ideal. As another example, Wieland, Bauer, and Deetz (2009) claimed that entrepreneurial culture has been appropriated so that it makes possible extreme careerism. This has destructive implications for organizations, families, and individuals who are *colonized* further when entrepreneurialism turns workers into producers and is used to justify decisions to forgo leaves of absence.

Gender is woven into the Discourse of entrepreneurialism and is implicated in material consequences for both men and women in organizations. Entrepreneurialism is widely recognized as a masculine Discourse by scholars because men are most often assumed to take the family breadwinner or risk taker roles (Mulhulland, 1996; Miller, 2002; Kerfoot, 1998). For example, in her study of female entrepreneurs, P. Lewis (2006) pointed out that the masculinity is an "unmarked category" against which otherness is constructed (p. 455). For this reason, the female entrepreneurs in P. Lewis' study overwhelmingly claimed that gender had no factor in

their decisions and even showed hostility when particularly “female” Discourses entered discussions. The masculine entrepreneurialist Discourse prevents men from engaging as fully as they might like in their private lives. As another example, less than 3% of all U.S. stay-at-home parents are fathers (Shaver, 2007). Extensive research has demonstrated that men are frequently cast in the role of necessary breadwinner (Zuo, 2004; Pleck, 2004). The strong alignment of men with public or work domains and, similarly, women and private domains is further impacted by the material reality of higher salaries for men, which keeps men in the workforce and out of the home more readily (see, e.g., Romany, 1993; Bordo, 2000).

When entrepreneurialism is viewed as a masculine Discourse, gender and organizational scholars can begin to unravel what implications this masculinized entrepreneurialism holds for women, both in and out of organizations. As one example of this unraveling, Medved and Kirby (2005) examined the use of traditional work terms by stay-at-home moms. Referring to themselves as the “family CEO,” stay-at-home mothers are frequently told that “motherhood is a career” (Sanders & Bullen, 2002, p. xi). By commodifying stay-at-home mothering in entrepreneurialist language, notions of choice and balance begin to gain traction. The “choice” to stay home with children or to return to work may be measured in the hourly wage worth of the woman compared to daycare costs. The material reality of the wage gap typically means that if one parent is to forgo paid work, it will likely be the woman.

Parenting itself a notable area in which the gendered nature of entrepreneurialism is apparent. Cameron (2000) noted that parenting is an institution that is swept up in the enterprise movement and is increasingly viewed as a quasimanagerial skill. Here, parents are responsible for the biological development of their child (e.g., serving the right foods, interpreting immunization schedules, and ensuring proper growth patterns), the psychological, social, and

cognitive development of their children, as well as for providing a safe environment (e.g., safe shelter, protection, and clothing). Parents must drive safe vehicles, remove the lead from their homes, prevent allergies, and create opportunities for their children to learn culture. "Responsible" parents are well versed in the needs of children as scripted by "experts." Parents not only risk having their children taken away by social services should they fail to parent in this way, but also face the extensive expense of parenting under entrepreneurialism. These expenses, of course, require more paid work from parents. Nadesan (2002) discussed the entrepreneurial infant, and the essential enterprising of quality parenting. Nadesan claimed that the Discourse of brain science (and the associated marketing and developmental toy sales) turns infants into entrepreneurial subjects who are born to perform preferred "gold collar" jobs in knowledge organizations (2002, p. 412; see also Munk,1998; Shaker & Gembicki, 1999). Nadesan further asserted that the influencing Discourses play off middle class values and fears, creating extreme anxiety in working parents who continually strive for perfection. Entrepreneurialist Discourse in parenting works to reify the men=public/work and women=private/home binary as women assume primary care of children and forgo paid work and as men increase their work activity to support the increasingly expensive lifestyle.

This pressure to be responsible for all aspects of child development, coupled with the expectation to manage one's career, can create an acute tension for men thinking about leave. Men thinking about leave often internalize Discourses about their obligation to home and family, yet still face entrepreneurialist pressures of personal work performance. Of course, individuals internalize entrepreneurialist Discourse in a myriad of ways, and these internalizations are frequently dependent on those individuals' organizational and occupational affiliations. Internalizations interact with many facets of identity to manifest in various ways that produce

any number of outcomes. This project looks specifically at how entrepreneurialism interacts with the occupational identities of men in technical occupations to influence leave policies and practices. It assumes that the standpoint of white men and men of color[2] in technical occupations is relevant in the way that entrepreneurialism is experienced and understood.

Feminist Standpoint theory and entrepreneurialism both provide frameworks for this dissertation to study how Discourses are gendered, biased, and resistant to change while also carrying opportunities for change. However, to understand how these are communicatively enacted in everyday life requires a theoretical bridge. In this case, identity, and occupational identity in particular, provides the necessary conceptual link between overarching Discourses that shape policy and the micro, everyday practices of individuals.

Identity

Identity is a theoretical link between macrolevel Discourses and the microlevel choices and practices of individuals. Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas (2008) loosely defined *identity* as "subjective meanings and experience, to our ongoing efforts to address the twin questions, 'Who am I?' and—by implication—'How should I act?'" (p. 6). They claimed that personal identity is entwined with feelings, values, behaviors, as well as with group and organizational identities, which, when combined, comprise the self (Alvesson et al., 2008). Identities are embedded in the social locations we inhabit, and discursive messages about the way we should act according to

[2] The use of the term "men" is particularly challenging in a feminist standpoint study. My feminist commitments encourage me to problematize essentialist terms such as "women" and "men" in favor of more specific descriptions of people that might include race and class, for example. However, gender is one way that we understand our social locations, and as such is sometimes a useful way of talking about how gender is accomplished for different bodies.

our social location greatly influence the way we understand ourselves. Kuhn (2006a) described identity as "the conception of the self reflexively and discursively understood by the self. Identities are shaped at every turn by multiple local and distal Discourses and require continuing justification to selves and others to sustain a particular self-narrative" (p. 1340). Maintaining a self-image that coincides with our categorical standpoints allows self-narratives to (re)produce Discourses that guide behavior. Thus identity serves to connect organizational and occupational Discourses with the everyday enactment of identity.

The tension and interplay of global influences and personal experiences plays an important role in the way standpoints are developed and thus in the way that identity is understood. As global Discourses are promulgated, individuals internalize messages and engage in continual reflexive study of their own behaviors. In turn, as they engage in episodes of (social) practice, individuals advance social positions that contribute to global Discourses. As this cycle continues, identity is the narrative that explains how individuals draw upon global Discourses to continually make and (re)make their self (Giddens, 1990).

Discourses, in particular, play a profound role in the development of individuals' identities and are important in identity formation, maintenance, and transformation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and in the maintenance of standpoints. In this light, Discourses may operate without being internalized by individuals and without regulating their identity, yet they are continually and largely effective in the strategic production of preferred subjectivities and expectations for particular social locations. Indeed, it is from Discourses that positionality and subjectivity emerge as identities or standpoints that are in relation to structures of power. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) offer nine ways that identity regulation operates through Discourse, including: (1) defining people directly, (2) defining people by defining others, (3)

providing a vocabulary of motives, (e.g., stories and archetypes), (4) explicating morals and values, (5) defining knowledge and skills, (6) developing group categorization and affiliation, (7) positioning hierarchical location, (8) establishing the rules of the game (e.g., the 'natural' way to do things in particular contexts), and, (9) defining the context. These moves directly target employees, action orientations, and social relations and contexts, and thus constitute preferred identities.

However, macrolevel Discourses and microlevel discursive resources (everyday practices) alone do not constitute identity. Coherent biographical narratives, material effects, and traditions that instruct about appropriate behavior make possible specific ways that the self might be constructed. Giddens (1990) described *lifestyles* as a construct that forces individuals to choose their paths from a variety of options and claimed that lifestyle choice in part constitutes identity. Lifestyles, however, are subject to particular constraints and can produce difference and marginalization. As individuals engage in day-to-day activities that help them achieve their desired lifestyle, they develop and solidify routines so that the routines re assumed as natural, necessary, and pre-given. Specific activities, however, are positioned as choices that individuals make in order to achieve desired lifestyles. Thus, "we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so [and, as such,] we have no choice but to choose" (Giddens, 1990, p. 81). As such, our choices and lifestyles are fundamentally cast as part of our identity, despite the presence of heavy scripting and formulation through macrolevel Discourse that actually limit available choices and eclipse feasible alternatives. Our standpoints emerge as a reflection of our "choices" and lifestyles that are entwined with our identities and experiences. Entrepreneurialism interacts with our standpoints and identities by framing particular expectations for the way identities should be enacted according to social location. To better

understand the identity thread, this section will be divided into 2 parts: first, I will explain occupational identities and then I examine how communication scholars have studied identities.

Occupational Identities

Occupational identity is an ongoing discursive exercise that cuts across time and space, institutions, and individuals, in response to necessity, desire, and material concerns (Ashcraft, 2007). Individuals draw upon available occupational Discourses to make sense of their work lives and to constitute their personal identities. Workers develop occupational selves very early in their careers, often during training or socialization through specific languages, meanings, skills, and values (Kuhn et al., 2008). Larson and Olson (2008) argued that while identities are fragmented and fluid, they are also coherent narratives that individuals appropriate from cultural and historical Discourses in unifying ways. Larson and Olson referred to "master-narratives" (p. 25), which serve as macro Discourses from which individuals can construct their sense of self in conjunction with the competing micronarratives of identity that are fragmented, fluid, and local. Occupational identities are master narratives that allow participants to bridge seemingly contradictory fragments of identity. Identities essentially are a means by which individuals categorize others and themselves. For example, people often ask others the question "What do you do?" by way of introduction, particularly in the United States. However, like many of the studies mentioned here, I recognize that occupational category is simplistic and essentialist. Allowing for multiple occupational identities within a single occupation is important; intersections of other identity resources such as race, class, gender, and ability inherently create different identities. Discourses of difference overlap and help to organize occupational identity (Ashcraft, 2007).

Occupational identities vary widely across work context and can teach communication scholars about the array of possible identities that might develop through work. For example, Hiestand and Buzzanell (2007) studied the occupational identity of career counselors. They found that the counselors developed counternarratives to battle misconceptions about their jobs and constructed self- and other-identities in career processes. The counselors drew on their past occupational identities, to construct themselves as people who learned from or grew from their past occupations. Career counselors found themselves in the precarious position of balancing dreams and reality and constantly (re)constituted both the meaning and meaningfulness of work to themselves and others. Thus, how individuals come to understand their own identities is largely dependent upon their occupational culture and their individual social positions.

Identity construction is an ongoing effort to negotiate competing Discourses. Agency is minimized by strong discursive constructions that guide occupational cultures. For example, Tracy, Myers, and Scott (2006) studied human service workers including 911 call takers, correctional officers, and firefighters and found that part of these workers' occupational identities revolved around using humor as a central discursive tool to help them make sense of their jobs, and particularly in ambiguous, dirty, tragic, dangerous, or otherwise identity challenging situations. Employees used dark jokes to characterize themselves as a "special breed of individuals capable of coping with the occupations' stress" (Tracy et al., 2006, p. 291). Selves are thus not only understood through occupational Discourses, but communication too is influenced by the occupation. As workers engage in accepted occupational moves, they continually reify occupational identities for themselves and others. As another example, Erickson (2008) analyzed the occupational identities of firefighters, weather forecasters, and auto mechanics as classed and gendered occupations. Erickson found that technical innovations

threatened both blue and white collar class identities in these fields and asked how technological advancements would function in relation to inequitable social structures in occupations. In particular, Erickson questioned the ability of men to find occupational spaces in the new service economy in ways that will not damage their sense of self.

Occupations are situated in historical contexts that developed around particular groups of workers. As such, occupations are political and are constructed and articulated in inequitable terms. However, occupations frequently become so regimented that people rarely stop to question the historical conditions upon which occupational assumptions stand. Because most occupations developed for white, hetero-partnered, abled men, considering how they might otherwise be structured is necessary. For example, Cohn's (2000) work about men's opposition to women's equality in the military (aptly titled, "How can she claim equal rights when she can't do as many push-ups?") shows how deeply engrained occupational and organizational identities are structurally gendered and dependent upon assumptions of social categories. In her analysis of equal standards, Cohn revealed the constructed and arbitrary nature of which standards are used to measure competence in the military. Cohn noted,

> since upper body strength and running speed are areas where most women will not be as strong as most men, they become the standard for proving [equality]. You do not hear, 'How can they ask for equal rights when they can't fly, or drive a tank, or lead, or do the job competently?" because women can (2000, p. 138).

However, arguments about equality in the military largely focus around women's ability to compete with men in physical performance standards, such as push-ups.

In another example, Greene, Ackers, and Black (2002) found that equality initiatives threatened the work identities of both male and female employees in two male-dominated

manufacturing workplaces. The researchers pointed to historical traditions and family and community values that (re)produced a gendered division of labor. Workers asked to adopt equality initiatives were pushed out of their comfort zones, and thus frequently resisted the change. Although work patterns and stations did change, longstanding social patterns did not change and workers reminisced about more comfortable times. The authors concluded that organizations must consider the complex nature of identities before making large structural changes in the name of equity. Indeed, how to encourage equity in light of deeply internalized gendered occupational identities is a complex endeavor.

In one effort to understand occupational segregation, Cohen (2004) argued that homeworking should be recognized as a unique occupation. He recoded "keeping house" from former Census data as an occupation in order to see how women's movement in and out of the paid labor force and the home affected the gender division of labor. Cohen argued that taking housework into account when tracking the overall gender division of labor is essential, particularly because houseworkers are overwhelmingly women and because estimates of gender segregation are higher when these women are included.

As yet another example, Ashcraft's (2005a, 2005b, 2007) ongoing work with male commercial airline pilots revealed the explicit and purposeful gendering of pilots. She traced how gender, race, class, and sexuality worked together to organize the airline pilot's professional identity. The aviation industry strategically worked to establish commercial flying as an activity for a privileged few and worked to establish a hierarchy of labor that limited occupational membership to all but a select few. While pilots were originally daring ladybirds on display to prove that flying was safe, the industry ultimately changed the public persona of pilot to a dependable male commanding officer. Heavy occupational Discourses of becoming "the man"

and “working up through the ranks” helped to naturalize occupational identities in aviation so that the historical construction of pilot as patriarch is overlooked.

If, as these studies assert, occupations are purposely and politically gendered, then it is quite possible that occupational identity will influence how technical workers understand and act in relation to leave policies. I embrace the notion of loose occupational categories, recognizing that these categories are multiple, fluid, and intersecting with other aspects of identity. In this way, categories (and our identifications to them) are useful tools for studying occupational Discourses that both enable and constrain workers. The studies described in this section reveal how occupations are gendered and how these gendered occupations influence the everyday practice of workers. It is here that occupational identity quite obviously influences the leave-taking practices of individual workers in technical occupations.

Studying Identity

Studying identity as it is influenced by Discourse is a slippery endeavor. One way to begin is to focus on discursive resources. As Kuhn et al. (2008) describe, a discursive resource is

> a concept, phrase, expression, trope, or other linguistic device that (a) is drawn from practices or texts, (b) is designed to affect other practices and texts, (c) explains past or present action, and (d) provides a horizon for future practice…Discursive resources, then, are “tools” that guide interpretations of experience and shape the construction of preferred conceptions of persons and groups; in so doing, they participate in identity regulation and identity work (p. 2).

Discursive resources are socially constructed ways of talking about phenomena that are drawn from particular contexts and from which cultural members derive and produce meaning. Thus, it is useful to study discursive resources as a means of understanding how people express their

identities (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). The discursive resources that are available to cultural members shape and define how individuals are able to express how they view themselves, including how they explain their own agency, such as choice. Understanding identity construction through discursive resources forces attention to *D*iscourses, the large scale, constitutive societal Discourses which inform microlevel everyday *d*iscourses (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000), and how these D/discourses interweave to organize social identities, making possible certain subjectivities while simultaneously suppressing others. Discursive resources determine which realities are possible, at point that makes possible very real power imbalances. As Kuhn et al. (2008) explained

> The agency apparently characterizing discursive resources pertaining to meaningful work ironically helps to mask its disciplinary power. Discursive resources supplied by formal organizations, occupations, and organizing systems enable identity construction and self-management but also obscure systemic constraints on agency and their grounding in gendered, classed, and raced Discourses about the freedom workers enjoy in their orientation to work (p. 6).

Discursive resources are generated by formal institutions and organized systems and are reified through continual use.

In this section, I have briefly outlined how the lacing of three theoretical frames informs this project. Feminist standpoint theory helps to illuminate the ways in which Discourses about leaves of absence are constructed around dominant social positions and lays the groundwork for a feminist discursive analysis of work–life practice. Entrepreneurialism is introduced to highlight the complex setting in which Discourses are interacting with everyday life and serves as a context from which any change must emerge. Occupational identity is the conceptual link

that threads together both the macro Discourses and the discursive resources drawn upon by workers to make sense of their occupational identities. Weaving these three conceptual areas together provides new space from which to understand work–life "balance" in organizations. In the following chapter, I will present an overview of work–life communication studies and will outline leave policy history and current practices.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROBLEMATIC WORK–LIFE "CHOICES"

Work–life research comes from many traditions, including family studies (Golden, 2001; McBride, 2006; Van Esterik & Greiner, 2009), cultural studies (Japp, 2006), feminism and gender studies (Medved & Kirby, 2005; Smythe, 2006), education (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006), political science (Garand & Monroe, 1995), management (Kim, 1998), law (Albiston, 2010; Bornstein, 2000–2001), organization studies (Collinson, 2003; Guest, 2002), and perhaps most effectively, organizational communication (Buzzanell, 2003; Halone, 2006; Kirby & Harter, 2001; Trethewey, 1999). The field of work–life research in communication conceptualizes the tension between work and life in terms of structure, practices, rituals, rules, cultures, and socialization. Tensions around these points highlight a number of communicative problems that relate to managing work and life. In this chapter, I review relevant background in and from work–life communication studies and situate leave policy and practice as a particularly complex element of the work–life realm. Then I outline the history of leave policy and describe and provide considerations for current leave practice.

Organizational communication provides a particularly unique perspective of organizations as communicatively constituted; in this framing, communication forms organizations and is an active site for the contestation and collaboration of relationships (Ashcraft, Kuhn, and Cooren, 2009). As such, it provides a comprehensive "home" for understanding work–life issues. The character of work–life studies is inherently communicative. Choices themselves are the everyday enactments of large scale Discourses. Extensive work in organizational contexts serves as a platform to capture the broad and local instances of work–life conflict as they are constituted through communication. Studies about work-life have begun to

unravel how concepts such as *balance* and *choice* are discursive constructions that are situated in organizational contexts.

The term *balance* has been critiqued as problematic. To speak of work–life *balance* implies that balance is indeed possible or desirable and that anyone who is not sufficiently *balanced* is doing something wrong (Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003). Other metaphors used to describe the overlap of work and life spheres include "navigation," "spillover" (Crouter, 1984), "collision" (Pocock, 2003), and "juggling" (Loflin & Musig, 2007). Navigation implies that there is a correct path, if one can read the stars. Juggling implies that if one is skilled enough, one could do it right, without dropping any balls.

Instead, some scholars (e.g., Kirby et al., 2003) employ the term *work–life management* to acknowledge the effort involved in making space for both work and life. Unlike balance metaphors, management implies that balance does not simply occur, thus creating space for arguments against prescribed notions of achieving balance. However, the term management may indicate that work and life *can* be managed, a notion that could certainly be problematic by potentially marginalizing any individuals who do not effectively "manage" work and life. Further, management assumes agency and rationality, assumptions that are problematic when taken without analysis. Moreover, work–life management is often presented as a dichotomy where work is on one end and life is on the other. The use of this dichotomy functions to separate work and life into two contradictory and clear-cut entities. However, thinking of work and life in this way conflates issues of boundary and identity, which intersect and overlap.

Tracy's (2008) discussion of *dialectics* proves more useful for understanding the complexities of work and life. Here a tension is framed as a complementary set of conditions, which is useful for work–life research. Scholars should acknowledge the overlapping instances

inherent in work and life, because work *is* a part of individuals' lives and much of their lives *are* work. Considering one sphere without the other is fruitless, and work–life scholars should examine the intersections and overlap rather than the much used and oversimplified dichotomy where work and life stand separate and in tension with each other. Scholars can still study the tension, but with greater attention to instances of overlap, intersectionality, and simultaneity (see Kirby et al., 2003, for an example of how to do this successfully).

Baxter (2007) pointed out that "we should be seeking ways to sustain dialogue" (p. 118) when solving problems. She claimed that working with an ongoing tension between competing poles could be a way to illuminate alternative ways of making meaning. By viewing work–life management as a dialectic instead of a dichotomy, scholars have the opportunity to "start a conversation" between the work and life worlds that may be useful to understand the intricate relationship between work and life. Leave-taking practice offers a particularly fruitful place to begin such a conversation, as it necessarily navigates a collision between work and nonwork.

Leaves of Absence

Leaves of absence are relatively unstudied in communication (for notable exceptions, see, e.g., Martin, 1990; Ashcraft, 1999; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Buzzanell, 2003; Meisenbach et al., 2008; and Buzzanell & Liu, 2005). However, because leaves of absences are situated in Discourses, they are inherently communicative in nature. Organizational communication is particularly well suited to study leaves of absence, because leaves are directly shaped by organizational policy and culture. Further, leave-taking practice by individual workers continually reifies existing understandings of what does and does not constitute appropriate leave-taking behavior.

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation there are a few communication studies that address leaves of absence that are particularly relevant for this study. For example, Ashcraft (1999) looked at leave in the context of succession. Ashcraft found that executive maternity is a uniquely gendered catalyst that brings sexuality, procreation, and emotionality into succession theory. Executive maternity requires organization theorists and members to engage the merging of "public" and "private," as executive work meets childbirth and infant care (Ashcraft, 1999, p. 272). Unearthing specific cases that force reconsideration of current understandings of leave are critical to move forward with gender equality at work. In another example, Martin (1990) deconstructed a haunting example of a female executive who arranged a caesarean birth in order to be present via closed circuit television for the launch of a new product. The organization was positioned as supportive, and the woman was positioned as flexible because she strategically arranged her leave of absence and was celebrated for her action by the organization.

Tracy (2008) argued for new support for *care work,* the time we spend caring for others (e.g., children, ailing relatives, aging parents) or volunteering for others in our community. Tracy suggested that organizations can and should begin valuing care work, because care work benefits everyone. She argued that raising future generations comprised of individuals who are well cared for results in better future employees, better individual and community health, and likely less crime. Tracy (2008) further called for organizations to embrace care work as a corporate social and ethical responsibility (e.g., in the same framing as protecting the environment), and suggested that organizations could provide paid time off to support care work. She supported these justifications by asserting that we were all cared for as children, that most of us will need care as we age, and that we all will face situations of care which involve

nonchildren. As such, care work should be framed as a common, collective endeavor that needs to be fully supported by organizations.

In a study about women faculty members, Schultz (2007) found that family leave policy is troublesome, and that practice rarely reflects policy. Even when female faculty members knew about family leave policies, they were constrained from taking leave because leaves of absence are a hindrance to achieving tenure. They were also regularly told they could not take leaves when they wanted them because departments lacked the resources to cover them in their absence. The nonuse of family leave served as a precedent for women interested in exercising their leave rights.

If women faculty members do not take leave when they need it, complications arise. For example, Dow (2008) pointed out that faculty parents regularly rely on colleagues to overcome challenges in managing work and family and that reliance can build resentment in departments. Dow proposed some tips for parents in colleague-friendly parenting, yet recognized that, ultimately, departments needed to provide more support. Boren and Johnson (2008) agreed that organizational members are interdependent and that employees with minimal familial obligations may feel resentment about their inability to use work–life policies. These factors can lead to individual employee guilt for using existing policies (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Boren & Johnson, 2008). Thus, workers who need leave and cannot use it are in a paradoxical bind: they cannot rely on their department or colleagues to manage work and family and they cannot rely on themselves because work and nonwork are sometimes impossible to manage alone. For instance, Gold (1996) did not take a maternity leave when she adopted her child and claimed that she felt "sorry, in retrospect, for the students in my courses that term, as they certainly could not compete with the enchantment of the baby" (p. 483). Issues such as the emotional and physical toll and

distraction of a new family member, serious medical problems, or other circumstances that mitigate the need for leave are often too much for individuals to handle alone without organizational support.

Kirby and Krone (2002) revealed that there is a difference between having a policy and actually using a policy, and cautioned that employees receive mixed messages about leave. This disconnect allows for colleagues to set norms about leave-taking. Employees who might take leave were saddled with guilt, peer pressure, resentment, and lowered status, while nonleave takers felt that such policies were unfair. In leave taking scenarios, colleague discourses created pressure for all employees who might have taken leave and also for employees who did not need leave.

In effort to depict how maternity leaves take on meanings in context, Buzzanell and colleagues produced a number of analyses about women's experiences with maternity leave, including the experiences of women with disabilities (Buzzanell, 2003), women in "pink collar" jobs (Meisenbach et al., 2008), and women who felt discouraged about their employment and either left their organizations or indicated job dissatisfaction after their leaves (Buzzanell & Liu, 2005). These articles highlight how women's experiences of leave are highly varied and how women of color, women with disabilities, and other kinds of mothers are regularly categorized only as women taking leave when, in fact, the contextual nuances of each experience make the *meaning* of leave quite diverse. When leave-taking is studied as if it has a single uniform meaning, Discourses about leave become heavily biased. While the aforementioned communicative studies make excellent contributions, it is problematic that there are so few works about leaves of absence, and particularly given the long history of leave.

Leave History

Employers and employees have long been concerned about how to manage time away from work. While sick time and vacation time cropped up first, parental leaves have a shorter history. The first maternity leave rights occurred in Germany in 1883 and by the beginning of World War I, 21 countries had established such policies, with leaves spanning from four to twelve weeks and approximately half of these policies offering paid leave. The International Labour Office hosted the first Maternity Protection Convention in 1919, specifying that pregnant women would not be permitted to work for the six weeks after confinement, that they could take six weeks of leave before confinement with a note from a doctor, and would maintain all benefits for themselves and their children during the leave. Furthermore, nursing mothers were ensured 30 minutes two times a day for breastfeeding. Most other industrialized countries implemented maternity leave policies at this time (Kamerman & Moss, 2011).

In 1967, Hungary developed childcare leave, intended for women after their maternity leave expired. This move eliminated some of the predominant gendered assumptions that only women could take leave. As a result of the development of childcare leave, parental leaves, intended for both parents after maternity, started gaining traction in organizations. These leaves allowed fathers to spend more time at home and more time on childcare around the time of their children's births (Kamerman & Moss, 2011).

Today, rights to paid maternity and parental leaves are given in every country part of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), except for Australia and the United States, although it is likely that Australia will implement a paid parental leave program soon (Kamerman & Moss, 2011). In the United States, the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which makes some provisions for workers taking leave, is noncomprehensive and

completely unpaid. Other countries differ in policy implementation, primarily in terms of how workers are paid (e.g., by individuals, by the government, by employers, or through a combination of these sources), lengths of workers' leave (typically ranging from three months to five years), who can use leave time (e.g., mothers, fathers, or both), how leave time can be used (e.g., including part-time options), and whether or not leave is considered as a family entitlement or as an individual entitlement (Kamerman & Moss, 2011). For example, some countries, such as Norway, have implemented leave specifically for fathers. Brandth and Kvande (2002) found that when leave was mandated specifically for fathers, men's actual use of parental leave rose by a much as 75%. Organizations designed his *fathers' quota* to encourage fathers to have more contact and care for their children and to help achieve gender equity by strengthening the ties of fathers to homes and mothers to workplaces.

Leave in the United States

Leave policies in the United States are highly conflictual, both in their history and current status. In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) as his first piece of legislation after a contentious Congressional battle and two vetoes from former President George Bush. FMLA is the first national policy in the United States that aims to balance work and family conflict. It is structured similarly to other labor laws (e.g., child labor laws, health and safety laws, Social Security, and the minimum wage), which establish minimum standards for employment. By positioning leave as a minimum work standard assumes that employees have the right to leave work for medical or familial concerns and that these concerns are legitimate (Albiston, 2010).

Specifically, the FMLA guarantees up to twelve weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave upon the employee's request for any of the following reasons: (a) caring for a new child,

including birth, adoption, or foster care (within one year). (b) caring for a seriously ill family member (e.g., a spouse, child, or parent); (c) managing or recovering from a serious medical condition that prevents the employee from performing his or her job; (d) caring for a family member injured in military service (up to 26 weeks in a single year); (e) addressing difficult situations that arise from a family member's military service (e.g., the employee's son, daughter, parent, spouse or next of kin who is on covered active duty). Federal law does not mandate that organizations allot their employees personal leave, sick leave, or bereavement leave; rather, these types of leave are options that employers can offer at will. These additional leave policies often interact with FMLA policies, such as when employees with pregnancies complications require more time away from work and that time off is deducted from their sick leave time or against their FMLA time.

Employees are guaranteed FMLA leave as a right and covered employers may not interfere with the Act or deny leave for qualifying employees. Federal laws also protect employees from retaliation by their employers for exercising their FMLA rights. FMLA requires that upon employees' return to work, organizations must restore employees to their previous or equivalent job with, at minimum, the same pay and benefits. Employees' benefits also are protected while employees are on leave. To qualify for FMLA, employees must have worked for their employer for at least twelve months and at least 1,250 hours within the past year, and the company must have a minimum of 50 employees within a 75-mile radius. One exception to this coverage is employees in the highest paid 10% of an organization, whose absence might cause serious economic turmoil to a company (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012a)

As it is written, the federal FMLA considers "family" to be immediate family only, including parents, spouses, and children. Individuals are parents when they are in "loco

parentis" and have day-to-day responsibilities of care or provide financial support for a child. Loco parentis status can be conferred or denied based on the age of the child, the degree of financial support, and the degree to which the child is dependent on the employee. Courts establish loco parentis on a case-by-case basis and employees utilizing FMLA benefits may be required to document their relationship to the child. Loco parentis begins to widen FMLA's definition of family, but it is open to interpretation. Amendments for service members, however, specifically include next of kin and adult children. Some states have expanded the language of family to include domestic partners and domestic partner's children, civil union partners, parent-in-law, grandparents, grandparents-in law, grandchildren, step parent, siblings related to the worker by blood, legal custody, and person with whom the employees lives.

Some states have also modified FMLA to lower the required number of employees for organizational coverage. Vermont, for example, requires companies with a few as 10 employees to provide parental leave. Other states have expanded FLMA to include time off work for other responsibilities, such as: organ or bone marrow donation (e.g., Connecticut); addressing domestic violence, stalking, or sexual assault, (e.g., Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, and Illinois); and for parents to attend their children's educational activities or medical visits (e.g., California, Washington DC) (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012b)

The federal goals of the policy include: increasing family stability and integrity, helping employees balance their work demands and family needs, to support family structure change, improving productivity and the quality of work environment in organizations, and creating workforce diversity and equal employment opportunity. The Act was initially designed to relieve stress on employed women. Congress found that women were disproportionally responsible for family caretaking, and recognized that, despite this inequity, women were

increasingly integrated into the paid work force. Thus, while the FMLA legislation was initially intended to be used solely by women, it is written in gender-neutral terminology (Bornstein, 2000–2001). This neutrality likely happened during the contentious squabbling that occurred during the passage of the Act, and potentially serves as a means to expand all workers' rights, regardless of gender.

Despite initial fear and serious opposition from U.S. employers, most businesses have implemented FMLA with little trouble. Organizations supporting FMLA policies report lower absenteeism and higher employee morale and loyalty, and have experienced little disruption to the workplace. Of the 10% of private sector worksites covered by FMLA, over 90% asserted that administering FMLA policies was easy (Bornstein, 2000–2001). Moreover, there are little to no costs associated with implementing the Act. For example, many organizations report that the Act is costless to implement and that it has even eliminated costs associated with employee turnover. Other estimates claim that FLMA costs employers approximately $250 a year for each employee who utilizes leave, but that this cost is offset by positive employment and earnings effects associated with the mandate and, thus, results in a slight positive net employment effect and a zero net wage effect for organizations (Waldfogel, 1999). Yet other research assumes that employers might expect to pay about $5.30 per year for each employee in the organization, whether or not he/she takes leave (Grill, 1995–1996).

As might be expected, female employees are more likely to take advantage of leave policies than their male counterparts. There is a wide range of conflicting statistical data that varies by state and sector, but women likely make up 58 to 83% of leave takers, compared to 18 to 42% of men (Kim, 1998; Bornstein, 2000–2001). Most leave takers report taking leave for their own personal health (60% to 73%), a smaller minority (13 to 23%) reported taking leave

because of a birth, adoption, or fostering of a new child, and the rest (4% to 15%) reported taking leave to care for an ill family member. Men, in particular, are most likely to take leave for their own serious health problems (approximately 97% of all male leave-takers), while only 2% of men took leave because of a birth, adoption, or fostering of a new child. These data suggest that women disproportionately use FMLA to care for family, while men are more likely to use FMLA to take care of their own personal health issues. Additionally, leave-taking practices vary by other demographic features. For example, women are most likely to take leave between the ages of 18 to 35, while men are most likely to take leave between the ages of 35 to 49 (Kim, 1998). Also, FMLA coverage varies by demographic features. For instance, low-income families, families with low levels of education, and Latinos are the least likely employees to be covered under FMLA. Additionally, low-income, part-time, young, and never married workers are least likely to meet FMLA requirements, even if the employees work for an organization covered by FMLA. Bornstein (2000–2001) estimated that 40.5% of U.S. employees are not covered by FMLA; however, Waldfogel (1999) found that although the impact of FMLA has been limited, more people do take leave since its passing.

Problems with FMLA

Although the FMLA passed, it is continually critiqued by a myriad of diverse groups including for example, feminists, many of whom critique FMLA because it is unpaid and noncomprehensive and small business owners, many of whom have claimed that FMLA is a financial burden. The Act is still a source of contention in the United States. In general, FMLA is critiqued because: (a) it is unpaid; (b) it does not reconcile state and federal conflicts, or (c) the tension between government and private management of leave; (d) it does not attempt to address cultural attitudes in the United States; (e) there is evidence of harmful workplace consequences

for people who take leave; (f) it does not take infant, child, or maternal health into account; and (g) it relies on biased organizational logics that systematically discriminate by gender, race, class, and ability. I will briefly unpack each critique in the following subsections.

Unpaid leave.

The first critique of FMLA is that leave employees may take is not paid. Despite the fact that the United States is one of only two OECD countries (of 38 total OECD countries) that does not support its citizens with paid leave, there have been few serious attempts to provide such a benefit (OECD, 2011). The issue of unpaid leave in the United States is perhaps the biggest problem identified with FMLA, in that it obstructs equitable use of the policy across gender, class, race, occupation, and familial status. Moreover, lost pay is the most frequently reported reason that employees do not exercise their rights to take leaves. Most obviously, FMLA privileges people who can financially support themselves for 12 weeks without pay. This most often includes upper middle-class women who have a male partner to support them. Because leave is often unpaid, taking leave is much more difficult for low-income families or families with only one income. Additionally, in coupled families with higher-earning men, it is likely that men, specifically, cannot afford to take unpaid leave. In the United States, gender, class, occupation, familial structure and race are intertwined so that many cannot afford to take unpaid time away from work. In this way, leave-taking is a seriously classed, raced, and heteronormative practice.

Paid leave is likely the primary way that all parents in the United States would have the ability to care for their newly born children. Because of the decline in real wages over the past few decades, coupled with a reduction in the purchasing power of the U.S. dollar, most U.S. families must have two paychecks to maintain the same standard of living as was possible with a

single income in the 1950s. This has made unpaid leave impractical or even impossible for the majority of U.S. citizens (Grill, 1995–1996).

Some scholars have suggested that an increase in *men* taking leave would help reduce stereotypical gendered work roles; however, men are more likely to only be able to take a leave if it that leave is paid (Bornstein, 2000–2001). However, because the provider/breadwinner role puts the economic burden of unpaid leave most heavily on men, men are less likely than women to be able to take leaves of absence. Thus, in order for men to truly be able to take on more responsibility at home and in carework, leave policies must advance so that paid leave is more readably available to men and women (Grill, 1995–1996). Furthermore, while most research on FMLA reaches this conclusion, Ondrich, Spiess, Yang, and Wagner (2003) caution that offering paid leave could cause some employers, who fear leave costs to further discriminate against women in their childbearing years. Similar Discourses of unbearable costs preceded the passing of unpaid leave, and thus warrant serious consideration as a major hurdle to overcome in the path to providing paid leave.

State/federal conflicts.

The second critique against FMLA is that it does not reconcile state and federal conflicts. These conflicts arise in both the implementation and study of employees' leave-taking practice because state and company policies often conflict with the guidelines of FMLA. Throughout history, the United States has centered family as the cornerstone of American civilization. However, responsibility for the maintenance and stability of families was given to the states, not the federal government. Federal interventions into individual cases most likely focused on individuals rather than families (Wisensale, 1997). In his inaugural speech, Ronald Regan (1981) voiced this ideology:

> In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problems; government is the problem. It is my intention to curb the size and influence of the federal establishment and to demand recognition of the distinction between the powers granted to the federal government and those reserved to the states or to the people (Inaugural Address of President Ronald Reagan, 1981, quoted in Wisensale, 1997, p. 78).

Indeed, the U.S. still struggles with how much federal regulation is necessary in family concerns, and states frequently intervene to set up different standards for families depending on where those family members live. As such, despite the fact that most U.S. citizens support family-friendly policies, the difficulty and structure of U.S. political decision-making may make transferring opinion into policy impossible (Huber & Stephens, 2001).

Government vs. private social policies.

A third enduring challenge with changing or improving FMLA leave policies is the ongoing tension between government and private control and/or responsibility of social policies. Particularly in the United States, privatization has a stronghold and citizens oscillate back and forth regarding how much governmental intervention they will tolerate. Within the context of privatization is a debate regarding whether the government should or should not provide "profamily" policies (e.g., paid family leave). Supporters of governmental intervention assert that the government must play a role in supporting leave policies, particularly in light of the changing workforce. However, U.S. citizens are hesitant to give too much power to the government. Opposition to FMLA focused on market driven leave options that would provide alternatives in leave practices. However, this market proved to be uneven and bereft of useful options. For example, while fiercely opposing FMLA, President George Bush argued that innovative private benefit plans would grow to accommodate workers and that FMLA would

stifle the development of such initiatives (Whittaker, 1991). This antistatism or opposition to governmental intervention (Bolzendahl & Olafsdottir, 2008) is a truism for U.S. citizens on the political or economic right. However, alternate studies have shown that U.S. Americans are not opposed to government intervention. Thus, what U.S. citizens actually support is reported in contradictory ways. For example, U.S. Americans could actually be ideologically opposed to high government intervention, but also increasingly unable to manage the pressure they face as nontraditional workers raising families.

The United States is quite unique in its decision to use employment to deliver social welfare benefits (Bornstein, 2000–2001). Some other countries (e.g., Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand) also emphasize private solutions to social issues, rather than promoting governmental public programs. However, when compared to these nations, the United States lags well behind in institutionalizing social welfare policy, and family policy in particular (Bolzendahl & Olafsdottir, 2008). The current system of distributing social benefits through workplaces allows for the intertwining of private benefits and social policy. For example, when commercial organizations are designated as the manager of benefits and of family stability, those employers become the administrators of public wellness. This corporate power enables those employers to privilege or exclude values based on economic views. Social policy is then considered in economic terms, rather than political concerns, and the emphasis of these policies shifts to focus on business costs rather than on social needs (Bornstein, 2000–2001). FMLA is, thus, inherently a clash between market driven policy and family values, which results in a complicated, disjointed, contradictory, and limited program that fails to alleviate work–family conflicts in the way it was originally intended. The failure of FMLA to remedy these discrepancies can result in confusion about *how* and *if* employees can exercise FMLA rights,

wage penalties, and litigation, and can lower career satisfaction and employment prospects, especially for women (Buzzanell, 2003).

Complications from the public/private debate about policy responsibility suggest a need to move discussions about leave policies from the corporate arena into a civic space that incorporates the needs of both organizations and families (Meisenbach et al., 2008). Deetz's (1992) work on corporate colonization reveals the intense control of the corporation's infringement onto the lives of citizens. Discursively moving leave policies out of such colonization, then, might be useful for citizens in need of leave.

Cultural attitudes and discourses about families and leaves of absence.

A fourth critique of FMLA is that it does not attempt to address cultural attitudes in the United States. A number of scholars have pointed to specific attitudes about family that exist within, and even pervade, the United States (Grill, 1995–1996; Wisensale, 1997; Moe & Shandy, 2010). For example, drawing on economist Nancy Folbre, Moe and Shandy (2010) argued,

> Americans view children as pets. In this current society, having children is sharply identified as a personal choice and parents are deemed responsible for all the care of them. This completely ignores that fact that children will become the next contributing members of our society. This is an extraordinary value for society which receives no compensation (p. 5).

Grill (1995–1996) expressed a similar argument in a comparison of U.S. attitudes and Swedish attitudes, noting that Swedish employers are willing to sacrifice for the good of society and encourage employees to take leave. She claimed,

> the Swedish sense of collective responsibility for child-rearing is relatively unknown in American society. Americans are very tax-averse and would decrease social

> expenditures rather than increase taxes in order to balance the government's budget" (Grill, 1995–1996, p. 388).

Indeed, Wisensale (1997) related, "the Regan administration consistently opposed federally funded child care and family leave. Why, this administration argued, should the American taxpayers pick up the tab for babysitting the kids of the middle class" (p. 79)? The repeated Discourses about individualism influence cultural attitudes about families and leaves of absence. When children become "choices" to be managed, then leaves of absence also become choices that workers could avoid if they selected a particular life path. Thus, these tendencies reflect the deeply embedded Discourse of entrepreneurialism.

Even when organizations develop work–family policies, certain pressures (e.g., supervisory, peer, and self-induced pressures) encourage employees not to make use of them and colleagues often tag such work–family policies as a form of preferential treatment that privileges parents and discriminates against childless employees. For example, Kirby and Krone (2002) studied employees' usage of organizations' leave policy and found that coworkers were frequently resentful of other employees' use of work–family policies. None of the studies' participants evidenced collective attitudes about balancing work and family or even expressed appreciation that work–family benefits were available to their coworkers. Further, participants seemed oblivious to the tradeoffs made by working parents (e.g., not recognizing that part-time workers were paid less). The now disbanded C*hildfree Network* organized women and men workers without children and spoke out about "workplace inequities," including: covering at work for absent people with kids, tax breaks for families with kids, and insurers paying for fertility procedures. Through Kirby and Krone's (2002) study, coupled with Dow's (2008) aforementioned article—which suggests tips for colleague-friendly parenting in the academy,

including “try not to bring infants/young children to the office” and “recognize that colleagues are not required to accommodate parenting philosophies; that is, what parents are convinced is good for their children may be bad for their collegial relationships” (p. 161; 163)—the message that leave is contentious and complicated in the United States is clear. This message is, however, a much different cultural attitude than other potential contexts for leave policy and practice.

The culture puzzle would become even more complicated when viewed through the lens of organizational cultures. Many scholars (e.g., Kirby & Krone, 2002; Albiston, 2010; Moe & Shandy, 2010) have confirmed that leave policies have little value when placed in organizational contexts that do not support those policies. Moreover, as Kirby and Krone (2002) pointed out, “although organizational policies are a form of structure, they are produced and reproduced through processes of interpretation and interaction” (p. 51). Organizational Discourse purports that committed workers come to work even if they are sick, thus foregoing their rights to medical leave. Conversely, workers who took leaves of absence (either because they were unwilling or unable to work while sick) were perceived as shirking their work or as generally less valuable employees (Albiston, 2010). Furthermore, stories about retaliation against employees taking leave work to keep potential leave takers from exercising their rights.

For example, in her study of meaning making around problematic or denied leave requests, Albiston (2010) described a new father who thought it was unthinkable to take more than one or two weeks of leave. This father claimed that his organization just was not open to men taking FMLA because they did not have the necessary biological recovery that might warrant a longer leave. In fact, *every* man in Albiston’s study claimed to have experienced hostility and skepticism from employers and coworkers. Many of these men agreed that *as men*, they should prioritize work in their lives. Moreover, another of Albiston’s respondents took

leave to care for his terminally ill wife. This respondent seemed fairly understanding when he received a disciplinary letter about his leave use and when his decision to take leave was questioned by his coworkers, employer, and even his wife.

In these examples, it is clear that culture both reflects and constructs active Discourses about family, health, and work expectations. However, it is the dominant cultural standpoint that is repeatedly internalized and purported. When we assume that taking leave is an individual problem or that taking leave is unproductive or unnecessary, we have unwittingly adopted the dominant standpoint without critique. In this section, I have outlined how large Discourses influence attitudes and culture; next I will argue that internalized Discourses also have material consequences for workers.

Actual workplace consequences of taking leave.

Prominent Discourses suggesting that taking advantage of FMLA might hurt employees' career progress are not unfounded, and these harmful workplace consequences for employees who take leave comprise a fifth critique against FMLA. For example, in their study of nearly 12,000 managers, Judiesch and Lyness (1999) found that managers who took leaves received fewer rewards because they were perceived to not conform to male organizational values, which signaled their incapacity to be effective managers. These leave-taking managers also faced a depreciation of their human capital when they were away from work (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999). Further, managers who took more than one leave of absence were only 25% as likely to get promoted as a manager who took only one leave (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999). Although the gendered impact of Judiesch and Lyness' findings was unclear (largely because the researchers did not have enough men in their study who took leaves), their study revealed that managers who took a single leave of absence received significantly fewer promotions, smaller salary increases,

and lower performance ratings. They also found that managers taking sick leave were significantly less likely to be promoted, which they believe suggests that taking a sick leave shows weakness, which runs against the typical masculine order of most organizations (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999).

As another example, T. D. Allen and Russell's (1999) experimental study about the perceptions of organizational commitment similarly found that men described as taking parental leave were the least likely to be recommended for rewards, as compared to men who did not take a leave, men who took a leave for a different reason, or women in all leave categories. In their study, while men taking parental leave scored the lowest in perceived work commitment, both men and women taking parental leave scored lower in perceived work commitment than all other leave conditions (T. D. Allen & Russell, 1999). These findings suggest that men who take advantage of family-friendly policies may be perceived as strange or uncommitted to work. Likewise, Bornstein (2000–2001) also found that men rarely exercise their leave rights because there is extreme pressure for them to forgo the time off. As these examples demonstrate, employer hostility, threat of job loss or lower promotion potential, and coworker peer pressure all worked to pressure men to forgo leave and stigmatized men who took leave.

Another problem with equitable use of FMLA is employees' fear of entering onto the *mommy track*, which describes a slowing or halting of career growth. Glass (2004) revealed that women with children have the slowest wage growth and account for most of the gender gap in wages. In fact, mothers earn only about half as much as men with equal qualifications. Arguably, most men and many women do not want to give up their position on the fast track at work, and, thus, work to protect themselves by forgoing children or by relinquishing their rights to leave in all cases (e.g., for illness or to care for others). Clearly, there are cultural inscriptions

that guide employees to forgo their rights to leave and violating these norms results in actual punishment for leave takers (e.g., in the forms of job loss; wage reduction; lowered perceptions of employees' commitment, organizational citizenship and performance; and other organizational or collegial reprimands). While scholarly research has been conducted on both organizational Discourses and on actual workplace consequences of taking leave, relatively little research focuses on issues beyond the worker–organization tension, (e.g., on child and maternal health concerns).

Infant, child, and maternal health.

A sixth critique of FMLA is that it does not take infant, child, or maternal health into account. Although some scholars (e.g., Kamerman, 2005; Kamerman & Moss, 2011; Berger, Hill, & Waldfogel, 2005; Galtry, 2002) have identified the health of infants and children as an important component of policy that warrants further attention from researchers, children are continually left in the margins of FMLA and other leave policy research. For example, Kamerman and Moss (2011) pointed out that while children are represented in actual policies, they are rarely advocated for in policy decisions. Further, the language of children's rights in not yet a serious consideration in leave policy discussions.

Specifically, Galtry (2002) argued that infant and child health is an important, yet rarely acknowledged, consideration in the determination of leave policies. Galtry contended that compelling health and economic rationales make the case that people should invest in infants. For example, one of those rationales asserts that infants who have their parents' undivided care during the first few months of life are much healthier than those who do not. Clearly, working parents who are able to take advantage of leave policies are better able to provide their infants with this kind of care. As another example, breastfeeding is an important factor of infant health

and is known to decrease the likelihood of a number of infant diseases (e.g., sudden infant death syndrome, SIDS), is associated with infants' increased cognitive development, and, additionally, has a number of health benefits for mothers. Moreover, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization both stress the importance of six months of exclusive breastfeeding for infants. However, the return to work is a major factor in the termination of breastfeeding for employed women, and most current leave policies only cover 12 weeks of employees' time away from work. As a result, in the United States, mothers breastfeed their infants at significantly shorter durations that mothers in other parts of the world (Galtry, 2002).

There also are health problems associated with childcare centers, particularly for very young infants. For instance, infectious diseases are transmitted more readily in these group care settings, which can incur economic consequences for organizations who must then accommodate parents leaving work to take care of sick children intermittently and who also likely pick up additional insurance costs.

Tanaka (2005) studied 18 OECD advanced industrialized countries to assess the outcomes of parental leave policies on the health of children. Spanning the years 1969 to 2000, Tanaka revealed that longer paid leave times resulted in lowered infant mortality rates. Unpaid and unprotected leaves did not have a significant effect. Additionally, Berger, Hill, and Waldfogel (2005) found that when mothers in the United States returned to work earlier than 12 weeks after giving birth, they were less likely to breastfeed, their children were less likely to have regular medical checkups or complete immunizations by 18 months, and if the mothers worked full-time, their children were more likely to show behavior problems by the time they reached age four.

Other, related work examines declining fertility rates around the world. Some countries have established more supportive leave policies in light of evidence that longer leaves lead to greater infant, child, and maternal health. Ellingsæter (2009) explained that Nordic countries have the highest rates of female employment and fertility, an important correlation to consider as many European countries attempt to reverse their demographic decline. The concept of a "fertility crisis" (Ellingsæter, 2009), particularly in the Western world, could have serious and dramatic consequences if countries cannot reproduce their populations. While the study found no direct connection between work–life policies and fertility, Ellingsæter was able to link the delay of first births and different spacing of births to work–life policies, and the presumed increase in maternal and child health was implicated in the study.

The United States is ranked the lowest of all OECD countries in terms of organizational leave offerings. For example, Swedish parents can take up to 13 months off work while the government pays up to 80% of their wages. Parents can take up to 90 additional days of leave at a reduced payment, either all at once or in smaller chunks of time, until their children are eight years old. Additionally, fathers are given two *Pappa* months, which is time only given to fathers. As another example, Norway allows workers nine weeks of maternity leave, a 10-week "daddy quota," which is time given specifically for fathers, and an additional 27 weeks of parental leave at 100% compensation or 37 weeks at 80% compensation. Norwegian parents' leave can be taken part-time until their children are three years old, 46 to 56 weeks. Iceland offers parents three-month maternity leaves and daddy quotas as well as an additional three months of parental leave that can be taken flexibly until their children are 18 months old. Finland offers parents four months maternity leave and a one-month daddy quota with an additional six months of parental leave at 70% compensation; if both parents work part time, the

leave can be extended to 44 weeks. Denmark offers 18 weeks of maternity leave and 32 weeks of parental leave at 90% compensation, which may be extended with reduced benefits.

Although these Nordic countries might be taken as extreme examples, other parts of the world are working to introduce leave policies that better support everyone. New Zealand, for example, has continually worked to improve its leave policies and now offers taxpayer-funded paid leave for eligible parents. As another example, in Germany, one parent per family can stay at home to care for children, regardless of whether or not this parent worked previously. Germany also offers a mother-protection period of eight weeks where women do not work, followed by three years of job protection for one parent to stay home and care for the children, which all parents are entitled to, including part-time workers. This job protection time is paid, tax–free, by the government and employers, as a child rearing benefit and as a percent of previous salary (Ondrich et al., 2003).

Perhaps most relevant for this study is the work about father-only leave, which is time that is specifically designed for fathers that cannot be shared with mothers. These "daddy quotas" have had clear and direct impact on fathers' use of leave. For instance, Brandth and Kvande (2002) studied the leave-taking practices of Norwegian men. In particular, Brandth and Kvande examined the impact of the government's attempt to reform the parenting practices of fathers, which included mandating four weeks of paid fathers' quota to increase the participation of fathers in early childcare, and found that requiring leave significantly increased the amount of leave time fathers took from work. However, with the mandated leave policies, fathers did not make as much use of optional leave policies beyond the mandated fathers' quota. Moreover, managers took additional leave less frequently than employees who were not managers, and fathers with lower education took less extended leave than those with higher education. Brandth

and Kvande also found that although the government mandated leave expectations, organizations were resistant to give men extended leaves, whereas women were automatically assumed to take a year off of work upon the birth of a child.

As a result of this study, Brandth and Kvande (2002) revealed four main types of leave-taking ideology amongst men. The first group included men who were absolutely committed to spending the first six months of a newborn child's life at home. These men took leave because they put a premium on the early bonding time with their kids. The second group of men felt pressure to do job-related tasks frequently and did not take as much leave. These men characterized themselves as highly committed to their careers. The third group of men didn't take additional leave beyond the fathers' quota because they could not afford to work at a reduced rate or keep the mother's salary. For purely economic reasons, these fathers couldn't take more leave. Finally, the fourth group of men did not take the fathers' quota either because they were already home frequently (e.g., they were self-employed) or because they would suffer financial losses. Also in this group were men who were not covered by the government or men who were uneducated about their potential leave options. Many men in this group were working-class men who did not see taking leave as consistent with their conception of masculinity.

Biased organizational logics.

Finally, a seventh critique against FMLA is that it relies on biased organizational logics that systematically discriminate by gender, race, class, and ability. Organizations, and U.S. organizations in particular, tend to organize in ways that preserve an unequal social order (see, e.g., Baines, 2010; Grimes, 2002; Tienari, Quack, & Theobald, 2002). Organizational logics are important for this dissertation and other leave projects because they underscore hidden scripts

that do not allow some employees to take leaves of absence from work. Acker (2006) defined such logics as inequality regimes, or the

> systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations. (p. 443)

While Acker contended that organizations differ in the extent to which they engage these inequalities, she maintained that inequality persists and, thus, is largely linked to the political context that informs the organizational logic. In a similar move, Albiston (2010) described *institutional inequality* as

> the ways in which institutions incorporate and perpetuate historically contingent social practices that define certain identities as subordinate to other . . . It posits that taken-for-granted workplace practices produce inequality because they recreate the social conditions that reinforce particular, historically contingent conceptions of gender or disability, even in the absence of individual animus. This approach draws on an historical analysis of institutionalization to explain how workplace practices came to be taken for granted, and the ways in which the contemporary meaning of those practices reflects the social conditions that accompanied their historical development. (p. 107)

Albiston noted that it is important to pay attention to the historical construction of inequalities because the concept of institutional inequality offers a means for social change by facilitating the reinterpretation of taken-for-granted meanings. Albiston also claimed that shifting focus to what work *should look like* instead of *who is protected* by antidiscrimination statutes moves the conversation away from special treatment and, instead, toward actual equality.

The well-known division of social order into masculine and feminine is a core piece of inequality in organizations. This order assumes two persistent logics across contexts: first, that males are different from females, and second, that masculine norms are prioritized in a well-defined hierarchy (Hirdman, 1990). This gender system is identifiable around the world and throughout history, in most societies, and has a profound impact on the construction of identities. Male bodies are ascribed masculine characteristics while female bodies are ascribed feminine characteristics, and bodies and characteristics that are labeled "feminine" are regarded as less than whatever is deemed as masculine (Butler, 1999; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006). This gender system has been both evident and problematic in organizations, particularly as more and more women with their ascribed femininities have entered the workforce. Indeed, Lindgren and Packendorff (2006), drawing on Ferguson (1984), claimed, "bureaucratic organizations and industrial mass production can be seen as contributing to a gender order that manifested itself in the whole life of modern human beings" (p. 842). Thus, it is not surprising that our organizations, which are patterned after our social order, highly prioritize masculinity over femininity; however, it is troubling that this pattern is continually reinforced in practice.

One particular problem in the structural organization of work is that it is structured around a universal/ideal worker (Acker, 1990). This universal/ideal worker is disembodied and asexual (Acker, 1990), available to work full time, does not have domestic responsibilities (e.g., has a wife to take care of this), and is able-bodied and healthy (Albiston, 2010). Further, the most effective universal/ideal workers are able to set their personal lives and emotions aside (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999), likely because this universal/ideal worker has no relationships or responsibilities outside of the workplace and has no outside attachments or obligations (Fenstermaker & West, 2002). Albiston (2010) argued that the universal worker ideal

> reflects a white, middle-class ideal more than it was a universal reality. Women, particularly immigrant women, poor women, and women of color, have always worked outside the home for wages despite the pervasive ideology of the family wage. The gendered division between wage labor and household tasks was thus not a universal pattern driven by the technological advances of industrialization, but instead a cultural frame for interpreting (and arguably, enforcing) modern labor patterns in terms of gender, and a particular classed perspective on gender at that. Family wage ideology also exacerbated class and race distinctions. The cult of domesticity helped draw class lines more clearly by glorifying middle-class women who could afford not to work and condemning working-class women, often immigrants or women of color, who worked to support their families. (p. 50)

Thus, the universal worker ideal unfairly disadvantages white women, women of color, single parents, people with disabilities and serious medical conditions, mothers, dual-income couples, people working in less affluent jobs, and men who cannot or will not conform to the ideal. As such, U.S. organizations become significantly classed, raced, gendered, abled, and heteronormative.

However, because less than 10% of U.S. families consist of a stay-at-home mother and a working father (Grill, 1995–1996), few employees actually embody this ideal. Regardless, work is structured around assumptions that workers' availability is constant, which results in an organizational value on face time. For example, Golden (2000) pointed out that working parents who reduce their face time might sacrifice their careers. This potential sacrifice is clearly an undesirable side effect of taking leaves of absence. As another example, Parker-Pope and Pope (2000) uncovered that face time is still a premium in most workplaces, which poses a problem to

the pursuit of flexible work and threatens workers' chances of actual work–nonwork balance. As such, the constructed importance of face time is one of the larger obstacles for workers who want to take a leave of absence, especially if there is a heavy emphasis on visibility as a mark of commitment in the organization. Valuing face time is a crucial example of the way the dominant standpoint is adopted by organizations without critique.

Moreover, as the universal worker ideal demonstrates, current masculine organizational logics favor *particular* men in organizations, and as such, not all men are advantaged by masculine logics. C. Connell (2010) described *hegemonic masculinity*, which refers to the dominant male heterosexual identity. The inscription of such logics on organization also oppresses men who do not embody the hegemonic masculinity, thus undermining the organizational logic that the universal worker will benefit all workers in organizations (R. W. Connell & Wood, 2005).

Furthermore, it is imperative to reiterate that inequality regimes (and their inscriptions on leave practice and usage) go well beyond gender. Race, class, sexuality, and ability, for example, are all also organized into institutional and hierarchical orders of inequality. Thus, interrogating the way leave policies are raced is just as important as analyzing the hegemonic masculinity that organizes the lives of women and men at work. For instance, Ashcraft and Allen (2003) argued that scholars largely ignore race in organizational analyses, and in doing so, actually reproduce and sustain implicit whiteness. As another example, Grimes (2002) noted that instances when whites choose to ignore whiteness, particularly in informative literature, make it more difficult for others to challenge whiteness. However, despite this knowledge about how organizations and social institutions and practices are raced, only a single study focused on how FMLA might be raced. In that study, Armenia and Gerstel (2006) argued that treating

women and men as homogenous groups does not capture variation in families necessary to understand leave practice. Rather, household composition and income, health status, and wage gaps are all raced variables that contribute to one's ability and/or willingness to take a leave of absence. Armenia and Gerstel also pointed out that African Americans and Latina/os—populations that may have greater health problems and/or more demands from relatives—may require leave more than white workers. However, these populations are also less likely to access leave because they frequently lack equal resources (e.g., family and organizational resources) to take a leave. It is important to note that Armenia and Gerstel only examined family leave and found that while white men were significantly less likely to take family leaves than women, men of color showed no significant difference in their propensity to take leave than white women or women of color. Armenia and Gerstel also found that the presence of a spouse or partner significantly increased employees' chances of taking a leave across all races. A final finding revealed that the interaction between race and gender was insignificant when looking at long leaves. Thus, the similarity between white women and both women and men of color is only significant in short leaves. As such, Armenia and Gerstel concluded that unpaid leaves reproduce occupational segregation and wage disparities across genders and races and do little to promote equity.

Understanding how leave policy is used across class is also important. Whittiker (1991) found that low-income workers currently do not take leave even for emergencies for fear of losing their jobs. They suggested that the job security of FMLA would be helpful for low-income workers in emergency situations and might encourage them to take time off for emergencies. Critics of FMLA have pointed to its classed design, particularly in regards to the 50-person threshold, the length of tenure with an organization, and the hours worked which

qualify employees for FMLA coverage, which excludes many workers (e.g., seasonal laborers; migrant workers; domestic workers; childcare workers; home health care providers; and most jobs held by low-wage workers of color, particularly including women of color). Furthermore, these statutes also exclude people who are unemployed and people with medical conditions who cannot work full time (Albiston, 2010).

In addition to the structural inequalities that lead to race and class discrimination, U.S. organizations (and thus leave policies) are inherently abled. Albiston (2010) explained that, historically, disability and work have been constructed as mutually exclusive categories and, as such, asserted that FMLA unfairly discriminates against people with disabilities, who are frequently segregated into less secure and nonstandard jobs. Albiston also pointed out that both people with disabilities and women have historically been classified as nonworkers, and, thus, have been excluded from the way work is structured and face difficulty when they attempt to exercise their rights to take a leave from work in institutions that require uninterrupted work. Similarly, courts have generally found that long leaves of absence, unpaid leaves of indefinite duration, and excessive or erratic absences are not reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities in the workplace. Albiston (2010) further argued that FMLA is an important change in family and disability policy because it focuses on the features of work itself rather than on the identity of workers, a move that disrupts the assumption that work and disability are mutually exclusive.

For these reasons, leave policy in the United States clearly reveals a bias toward particular kinds of workers, to the detriment of most others. As Bornstein (2000–2001) explained

> the Family and Medical Leave Act can be viewed as a proxy for national public values regarding the working family. The provisions of the Act embody and sustain the values that the government is willing to advance on behalf of the working family. At the same time, exclusions from the Act reflect a moral code, pronouncing which individuals and families are entitled to the coverage and security of a national policy, and which are not. While certain individuals and families are rewarded, protected, and benefited by the coverage of the Act, others are disadvantaged, punished, disregarded, and ignored. (p. 81)

As long as U.S. organizations continue to structure work around the universal worker ideal, leave policies will inevitably be rife with inequality. As Buzzanell (1995) argued, "gender organizes every aspect of our social and work lives including how we formally and informally communicate in organizational settings" (p. 327). Buzzanell further criticized many "equality" moves because they work at surface levels but do not alter the "fundamental motif of organizational life" (p. 333) and, thus, are not effective in changing the social order. As such, these surface equality moves do not significantly propel organizations toward equity; rather, organizations still have considerable work to do in order to move beyond inequality regimes. The importance of social location has been left out of many of these studies. For example, Buzzanell (2003) argued that maternity leave policy has not been able to change the gendered interactions and organizing processes that continue to subordinate women. Thus, significant overhaul is required in order for leave policies to create more equity at work and home across social positions. One way to accomplish such a move is to study men and occupational identity, two topics which comprise the primary foci of this dissertation.

How men make sense of available occupational Discourses about choice, balance, work, and family important to generating gender parity and is dependent upon social location. Because

gendered constructions always exist in relationship to the Other, producing more knowledge about the ways that men understand leave-taking is necessary. The existing theoretical work about women and leave is inadequate to change the highly gendered nature of leave policy and practice, particularly in high-tech organizations. By theorizing only surface level differences (such as numbers of women and men in organizations) much of this existing work overlooks the deep structural inequalities. Technical occupations remain one of the most challenging and biased organizational contexts, and as such it makes sense to study ongoing sites of gender tension (such as leave-taking) here. Furthermore, if technical male workers internalize gendered occupational Discourses about leaves of absence, a key to undoing some inequity may be in understanding how identities are shaped by biased Discourses such as entrepreneurialism. These questions and challenges are at the heart of this dissertation, which aims to examine the leave-taking practices of men in technical occupations.

Research Questions

The insights from chapters two and three in this dissertation reveal problematic theories that are not capable of advancing knowledge in current organizations. In order to work toward the feminist goal of gender equality and the reduction of oppression, I am focusing this study on the leave practices of white men and men of color. Decisions about leave are constituted through discursive resources and occupational identities that reflect Discourses. As such, this study seeks to understand specifically how men draw upon the Discourse of entrepreneurialism and their occupational identities to make sense of their leave-taking choices. Currently, no studies to date have investigated the ways in which men discursively construct their experiences around (not) taking leave. If leave is (re)produced, contested, negotiated, and resisted in complex ways; set in unique contexts; and dependent on a variety of identity variables, such a nuanced study is

warranted. Further, in order to contribute to and extend gendered theories of organization, weaving a standpoint feminist epistemology around Discourses of entrepreneurialism and occupational identities can reveal new ways of knowing organization and gender. Thus, the research questions for this study include:

RQ1: (How) do male computer scientists and engineers construct their occupational identity?

RQ2: What (if any) Discourses do male computer scientists and engineers draw upon to describe their leave-taking practices?

RQ3: What discursive resources do high-tech male workers use to make sense of "balance" or to resist its imposition?

At present, these research questions have not yet been studied and likely will reveal new and useful information about biased organizational logics, occupational identities (specifically technical occupational identities), and Discourses of entrepreneurialism and balance. Moreover, as a feminist contribution, this study seeks to increase equity of marginalized groups in organizations. Specifically, the first research question offers a means to see how occupational Discourses inform individuals about their own jobs and the discursive resources drawn upon by the men in this study to talk about their work. The second research question sheds light upon a gendered practice in organization that works to perpetuate gender inequality. Finally, the third research question illuminates the discursive resources employed to understand or resist "balance," a concept which has significant traction in scholarly and colloquial discussions of gender. While this dissertation foregrounds gender, the findings also have implications for other marginalized groups in organizations (e.g., people with disabilities and people of color).

In general, rectifying structural inequality is a lofty goal, one that will only be realized through incremental steps. This study is one such step in the process of reaching parity. Although a few studies have been published regarding occupational identity, which often take a discursive lens to identity, at present, no research exists about how occupational Discourses frame leave-taking "choices" in organizations. Thus, answering these research questions will contribute to what scholars know about occupational Discourses and about how occupational identities reach beyond occupations and into everyday practice. Furthermore, the focus on computer scientists and engineers will contribute specifically to knowledge about these occupational contexts, which will be of interest to a number of scholars and institutions organized to understand the culture, parameters, intersections, and complexities of technical fields. Finally, while a number of studies show how Discourses both shape and are shaped by everyday action, this dissertation speaks specifically to the Discourses of entrepreneurialism and balance. Both Discourses have been examined in scholarly literature, yet both remain tied up and misunderstood in widespread use. As such, more work is necessary to begin to untangle the complexities of what it means to take on entrepreneurialist ideals and to speak of achieving balance.

This chapter has examined scholarly literature on work–life and concluded by posing three research questions that aim to uncover connections between male leave-taking practices, occupational identity, and Discourses of balance and entrepreneurialism. To address these research questions, I use a feminist qualitative methodological approach. In the next chapter, I describe these ontological and epistemological commitments and the specific methods used in this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEMINIST DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

This study is guided by feminist epistemological and qualitative methodological commitments that shape the ways I have set out to answer my research questions. These particular commitments are at once enlightening and constraining in conducting research. Feminism and qualitative research are tentative allies in the quest for scholarly work on gender. They share some philosophical aims and concerns, yet also contradict each other in places. Working within these two traditions requires some sorting out and reconciliation. In this chapter, I discuss relevant points of alliance and tension between these methodologies. Then, I describe discourse analysis, the methodology utilized in this project. I next explain the data collection methods techniques employed in this study: interviewing and textual analysis. I conclude this chapter with a description of my data analysis techniques and a description of my own situatedness in this project.

Background on Qualitative Research in Communication

For years, the field of communication (as with most other fields) was dominated by positivist and postpositivist research and characterized by the search for behavioral "causes," a focus on predicting and controlling behavior, and the use of objective, quantitative methods in artificial settings. Scholarly research took an interpretive turn when scholars began to question the plausibility of "facts," which opened up new possibilities for conducting research and discovering meaning. Important new commitments of this interpretive turn included considerations for plural and local phenomena, social construction, an interdependent relationship between the researcher(s) and the researched, truth as always partial, and reflexivity.

For many communication researchers, these ontological and epistemological shifts generated new questions and, in turn, foregrounded the need for new methods. Qualitative methods emerged as a response to this need. Qualitative methods assume social construction, and focus on multiple and local phenomena. Unlike positivist and postpositivist work, qualitative research has no assumption that there is a single "Truth" or objectivity, and instead promotes the need for reflexivity and consideration for the two-way relationship between the researcher and the researched.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) claimed that "fundamentally, qualitative researchers seek to preserve and analyze the situated form, content, and experience of social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations" (p. 18). The emphasis on situated context and everyday social action is both important and also markedly different than positivist work. Chesebro and Borisoff (2007) identified other characteristics of qualitative research, including a preference for a natural setting (i.e., where data collection happens in a time and place determined by the subjects) and including the researcher as a research participant. They also suggested that subject-based communication (where subjects identify and determine topics of communication and provide qualifiers as necessary) and subject intentionality (where researchers attempt to understand the subject's communication) are important for qualitative researchers. Lastly, Chesebro and Borisoff (2007) also suggested that qualitative work should be pragmatic, in that the results of the research should help resolve an existing social problem. Rather than relying on mathematical, quantitative methods that aim for generalizability, qualitative methods value deep insight in narrower contexts that may or may not be generalizable. Indeed, as Ashcraft (1999) explained,

> qualitative methods are not merely heuristic tools in the service of objective, generalizable knowledge. They engender a different, salient form of understanding. Qualitative methods enable us to investigate situated action, to illuminate the meanings and practices that constitute actual succession events, and, thus, to facilitate fuller awareness of context and process (p. 252).

In this way, gaining a deeper, more salient understanding of a situated phenomenon is possible. Topics and tools used in qualitative inquiry are sometimes controversial; however, while much of our history has been defensive, qualitative methods is now enjoying a more mainstream position in the academy. What and how scholars study qualitatively may be controversial, yet many scholars remain committed to uncovering deep analyses of the ways in which people symbolically perform to create meaning (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Qualitative researchers are committed to reflexivity in their work and embrace the notion that subjectivity is embedded in all research. Goltz (2011) argued that positioning oneself as both an author and as a critic presents an ethical difficulty that might be overcome with reflexivity. By thinking about how we engage the personal voice, and by focusing on a collaborative partnership in our work, a more ethical presentation is possible.

Feminist researchers also claim that personal values, emotions, and social context influence the production of "truth". Jaggar's (2008) work on emotion in feminist epistemology serves as an excellent example of how emotions contribute to knowledge production. Jaggar concluded, "emotions are neither more basic than observation, reason or action in building theory, nor secondary to them. Each of these human faculties reflects an aspect of human knowing inseparable from the other aspects" (p. 389). Jaggar's assertion is a strong example of a bridge beyond the subjective–objective binary. Accepting embedded subjectivity in research

while also attempting to maintain some researcher objectivity is possible, as subjectivity and objectivity influence each other in research. Both subjectivity and objectivity are important and are reliant on other components to function as knowledge. Transcending this binary through reflexivity and by including participants in research is an effort that many qualitative scholars and feminists take on in their work. For instance, Acker et al. (1983) explained

> The assumption that the researcher must and can strive to be a neutral observer standing outside the social realities being studied is made by many who use quantitative and qualitative methods in a natural science model. This assumption is challenged by the feminist critique of social science that documents that male bias of theory and research that has previously been taken as a neutral account of human society. A feminist methodology must, therefore, deal with the issues of objectivity in social science and, in the process, deal also with the issue of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. As researchers, we must not impose our definitions of reality on those researched, for to do so would undermine our intention to work toward a sociology for women. Our intention is to minimize the tendency in all research to transform those researched into objects of scrutiny and manipulation. In the ideal case, we want to create conditions in which the object of research enters into the process as an active subject. (p. 135).

In both qualitative and feminist research, the researcher/subject relationship is very important. Because the production of knowledge is an act of power, conducted by researchers with unique power positions to research participants, researchers should view research subjects as equal partners. The goals and design of the research project both can and should be collaborative. Moreover, Kirsch and Mortensen (1999) suggested that making participants

collaborators is beneficial because participants can best express their experiences, and, by working closely with participants, researchers can jointly create the necessary vocabulary to articulate findings in a way that is mutually helpful. In this dissertation, I chose feminist qualitative methods for many of the reasons outlined above, including, in particular: the ability to generate deep insight from situated, local populations; the ability to capture marginalized voices; and because using qualitative methods allows me to ask questions about Discourse and identity in a more nuanced way.

In particular, standpoint feminism is used in this dissertation to capture the way that our social location influences the way we understand and produce meaning. Historically, standpoint feminism helped to highlight the way that intersections of oppression worked to create a condition in which people in social locations with relatively little power could speak into social phenomena because they could "perform" their own roles and the roles of others in dominant groups. Thus, applying standpoint feminism to privileged, primarily white men is potentially a controversial move. However, because this study is attempting to understand the practices of men in technical occupations, *a particular social location*, it is useful to apply standpoint feminism because it takes this social location into account. This is not to suggest that the men interviewed in this study represent a homogenous group, but rather to say that it is useful to draw upon standpoint theory when talking about "men" and how their experiences differ from "women's" experiences. Gender is taken as one aspect of our social location that is influential in the ways that we construct meaning.

A Discursive Approach

A discursive approach to organizing assumes that meanings are always in process, and are continually constructed through interaction and language (see, e.g., Fairhurst & Putnam,

2004; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Through discursive resources, individuals learn how to act, what to think, and how to talk. Thus, through micro discourse scholars can see influential macro Discourses at work, and by analyzing macro Discourses, can observe effects on everyday life. Tracy and Rivera (2009) explained,

> a discursive approach suggests that a robust way to understand the material policies and practices of work–life is too closely listen to the way organizational power holders' talk about family, work, and gender. Indeed, through analyzing mundane talk, we may access larger Discourses (such as sexism and patriarchy) that guide action. (p. 4)

In particular, Tracy and Rivera argued that scripts are most troublesome when they are left uncritiqued, in that silence about Discourses, and particularly those that evoke inequality, diminishes the opportunity for transformation.

Data Collection

To answer the three research questions, data were gathered for this dissertation in two primary ways: (1) through a textual analysis of popular autobiographies and biographies of high profile computer scientists and engineers and (2) through interviews with male computer scientists and engineers. These two techniques helped me to study how Discourses influence leave-taking practice, both by illuminating the available discursive resources in occupational Discourses and also by bringing to light what is often not said by organizational leaders. Interviews are the most popular approach to answer questions about identity (Alvesson et al., 2008). However, interviews alone are not comprehensive enough to encapsulate identity, because the interview itself is a socially constructed site that is political and that involves impression management. Providing multiple sources of data helped me gather a more nuanced understanding of identity. Using these dual methods also enabled me to draw connections

between occupational Discourses and identities, entrepreneurialism, and leave-taking practices, and in doing so, illuminated a complex interplay of Discourse and everyday lived experience. The following subsections discuss textual analysis and interviewing in the context of this dissertation.

Textual Analysis

As a means of grounding this dissertation in Discourse, I analyzed the Discourses of high ranking male computer scientists and engineers through their popular biographies and autobiographies. As Ashcraft and Flores (2000) suggested, texts comprise cultural Discourses and, as such, are best understood as pieces of larger cultural narratives. Accordingly, texts provide one way to understand organizations and, more specifically, how organizational and/or managerial Discourses work on/with employee identities. Carl (2005) argued that organizational textual documents continually act as macroactors in the discursive construction of organizations, either with or without the original producer in place. This is particularly true of popular texts, which have such broad audiences that they often transcend organizations or occupations. Additionally, Nadesan (2001) argued that popular texts help shape managerial Discourses by drawing attention to particular workplace practices, management trends, and economic relations. Hence, in this dissertation, I argue that popular texts inform and promote specific kinds of practices and behaviors in occupations.

Popular writing, including the texts I analyze in this dissertation, is both important and also different in many ways from traditional academic writing. Lewis et al. (2006) explained that popular press books serve as a discursive framework for organizational life and affect the feelings and confidence of managers at a micro level. They claimed that "it is useful for researchers of business practices to examine [popular press books] to better enable theoretical

explanation for the tendencies observed in managers' choices of communication strategies and tactics" (p. 115). Indeed, the ways in which organizational communication is influenced by popular press books is an important focus of this study. May and Zorn (2001) claimed that studying popular writing is important for organizational communication scholars because this genre largely focuses on the same phenomena as scholarly literature in the same genre, but, unlike that body of academic writing, popular writing reaches millions of readers. Further, managers and other workers consume this material and subsequently enact the strategies they learn in their day-to-day activities. Whereas the publication and methodological standards of popular writing are different than those scholars may be accustomed to in academia, these texts, nonetheless, comprise a substantial and highly persuasive body of work. May and Zorn (2011) conclude that if popular "writing is important to the people we study, it should be important to us" as academics (p. 472).

Indeed, popular business texts have not lost any traction in their massive and persuasive appeal. Furusten (1999, in Jackson, 2001) argued that the "textual representations of managerial and organizational life that are presented in popular management books create a powerful isomorphic pressure that contributes to the increasing homogenization among organizations throughout the world" (p. 486). As such, as popular texts about iconic figures are produced and consumed in mass quantity, they become part of the fabric of organizational life. Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) even asserted that text is a central means through which organizational communication scholars might begin to analyze larger societal Discourses. Thus, as individuals consume the occupational representations in texts, they are able to either enact or resist the offered scripts in organizational life. As such, organizational communication scholars are not

only poised to, but are also responsible for, studying how these texts influence organizing and life in organizations.

To begin collecting data from popular texts, I started with the most recent Fortune 500 list of companies (see Appendix D) and identified all the companies that would be likely relevant for this study, based on if they qualified as a technical or engineering company, including companies from the following subsections: Computer Peripherals, Aerospace and Defense, Computer Software, Informational Technology Services, Semi Conductors and Other Electronic Components and Engineering Construction. This generated a list of 40 companies, and a list of their respective CEOs and founders.

Next, I searched Amazon.com by each name of the CEOs and founders to find all the CEOs and founders that had biographies or autobiographies. I found that most of the individuals on my generated list had not written books themselves and did not have books written about them, but a few iconic figureheads (e.g., Bill Gates, Steve Jobs) did have either autobiographies or biographies, and that in some cases (e.g., Bill Gates), a number of books were written about the icon. In this case, I prioritized autobiographies, then authorized biographies, and then biographies.

A total of nine books were identified for this study, all written about male CEOs or company founders, and included the following men (in alphabetic order): Paul Allen, cofounder of Microsoft; Steve Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft; Sergey Brin, cofounder of Google; Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com; Bill Gates, cofounder of Microsoft; Steve Jobs, cofounder of Apple; Larry Page, cofounder of Google; John Sculley, former CEO of Apple; and Steve Wozniak, cofounder of Apple. I read and analyzed these texts, pulling data from the texts as themes emerged that indicated relevant occupational Discourses. In particular, I included and later

coded any mention of leaves of absence or other nonwork pursuits as relevant data. Books that made no mention of leaves of absence or other work–life constructs were also coded as such.

The textual analysis portion of this study provided a Discourse for how high-ranking men in technical organizations both supported and resisted leaves of absence as part of their personal organizational experience. These texts also provided data about occupational and entrepreneurial Discourses, which were confirmed, contradicted, and modified by male workers in the interviews. As such, and as is further explained in the next section, interview data worked in conjunction with the popular text analyses to reveal a bigger picture of how Discourses were promoted and manifested in individual identities and actions.

Interviews

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) described the research interview as "particularly well suited to *understand the social actor's experience and perspective*" (p. 173, italics in original). They pointed out that, interviews are complicated because people sometimes interpret their experiences in different ways, forget details, lie, and make mistakes in reporting, but are nonetheless a fascinating and insightful way to study Discourse. Moreover, Lindlof and Taylor identified one primary purpose of interviewing as drawing out "individual, interpersonal, or cultural logics that people employ in their communicative performances" (p. 174). Indeed, in this dissertation, I used interviews to gain insight into men's leave-taking choices and, through interviewees' stories and accounts, I learned something about the broad cultural logics (both produced and reproduced in Discourse) that guided their choices. In particular, I was interested in the men's accounts of their own experiences and their perceptions of others' experiences.

I constructed an interview protocol based on published research and from insights from another interview project about men's experiences with gender equity (NCWIT, 2011). My

interviews were lightly scheduled into four sections. I first asked a series of background questions, including "How do you describe your occupation to others?" and "What are important characteristics of people in your line of work?" Second, I asked interviewees about their experiences with leave and leave policies, including questions such as "What is your company's policy for leaves of absence?" and "Was there ever a time that you thought about taking a leave, or would have qualified for a leave of absence but did not take it?" Next, I asked interviewees about their perceptions of leaves of absence, such as "Why don't men take leaves of absence as often as women?" Finally, I asked the men about their perceptions of work–life balance and asked questions such as "What does balance mean to you?" Although I used the interview protocol, I followed up on relevant stories that were important to interviewees and allowed the interviews to expand or decrease on some areas based on the interviewee's experience. I tried to minimize the *demand effect* (Nichols & Maner, 2008) when participants tended to respond to questions in ways that confirmed my research project by leaving questions open-ended and by not alluding to a specific definition of ambiguous terms such as "occupation" or "balance."

Throughout the study, I paid close attention for declarations. As Jorgenson (2002) described, *declarations* are "direct claims made by speakers on attributes and identities (e.g., 'I was always good in math') or statements that give a report on how things appear from speakers' points of view (e.g., 'Engineering is a gender-neutral field')" (p. 361). When I heard an utterance that was a declaration, I followed up with probing questions so that I understood what discursive resources the interviewees drew upon to describe their work and leave choices.

People's identities and experiences are not independent of the interview context. Thus, the interviewees' perception of me as an interviewer inevitably shaped they way that their experiences were presented in the interview. In particular, because I am a woman interviewing

men, I paid special attention to gendered dynamics at play during interviews. For a similar example from scholarly research, Arendell (1997) described the way that the divorced fathers she interviewed consistently confirmed their identities *as men* and how the male interviewees frequently took the interview situation as a means to reproduce stereotypical gender roles by taking charge, questioning the interviewer, acting chivalrous, overstepping personal boundaries, and asserting superiority. Like Arendell, I assumed that my male participants would be "gender enlightened" (e.g., giving answers that seemed politically correct), which was sometimes not the case. This left me to work through a significant tension of playing into stereotypical gender role performances: on the one hand, the desire to build rapport during interviews, and, on the other hand, the desire to maintain my commitment to feminist premises, which necessitated a break from such performances.

In a few instances, my political commitments were directly questioned. I was at first taken aback from these questions. It did not occur to me that the men I was interviewing would feel threatened by my feminist commitments, because I attempted to remain neutral so that I could capture the interviewee's words rather than shades of my own. I also did not anticipate that some would vehemently resist the idea that they might want time away from work. However, this occurrence reinforced the precariousness of the interview setting, and reminded me that my role in this research project is influential at every step of the project. When I was directly questioned about my commitments, I spoke about my personal desire to see more equitable workplaces and an increase in the opportunity for men to participate at home. While most of the interviewees who asked about my own views were satisfied with my honest responses, three interviewees explicitly disagreed that equality was desirable. Another became agitated that my feminist lens would skew his words and he asked that I take care not to "cherry

pick" his words. This request gave me considerable pause, and ultimately resulted in a disciplining of my own voice as I started to write the findings. A tension started here, from within my feminist commitments. On one hand, feminist research is guided by the tenet that interviewees are collaborators. Thus I did not want to "cherry pick" words or slant what my interviewees intended in the interview. On the other hand, I wanted to critically evaluate his position that gender equality was not desirable. In the interview, I politely deferred to the interviewee, and ultimately smoothed over the tension with an assurance that I was presenting the findings as I understood them-thus necessarily under my influence but with the intention to be true to my interviewees' experiences. It was only after the interview that I wondered how I could have handled the discussion differently so that I didn't fall into the traditional deferent role.

Another relevant aspect of my role as the interviewer is my relative lack of experience with technical cultures. I have studied technical organizations and occupations and have worked with a number of technical professionals tangentially. However, I have never worked in a technical organization, and I do not possess knowledge of the ways that programmers and engineers perform their work. This situation sometimes worked to my advantage in the interviews, as the men were able to "teach" me about their occupation. Other times, however, some men felt exasperated when I asked for clarification of acronyms or asked questions that might have seemed obvious to an insider.

In addition, my parental status was a regular point of conversation in the interviews. In many cases, the men asked me directly if I had children. In a couple of interviews, my children walked into my home office and were detected through the phone. Revealing my children worked both as an advantage in the interviews and as a disadvantage. In many cases, it seemed

to help build rapport with the interviewee, particularly with fathers about my age. However, revealing that I am an employed mother also created some awkwardness when interviewees gave opinions (frequently negative) about moms working outside the home. Most would apologize or otherwise save face about comments that they thought might have been offensive to me, but one explicitly disciplined me with aggressive comments about the "irresponsibility of mothers who work". My response to this was much like my responses outlined earlier. I politely deferred during the interview and later questioned what the "right" feminist move would have been. In the end, I handled objections, questions, and concerns honestly, selecting transparency over rapport when forced to choose.

Interview **l**ogistics. To begin the data collection, I received approval to conduct interviews and other data for this study from the Human Research Committee at the University of Colorado Boulder and was assigned protocol number 11-0672. I then sent out a recruitment email to my personal and professional contacts, asking these individuals to forward my recruitment email to any male computer scientists or engineers they personally knew. I also sent recruitment emails to the Computer Science and Engineering departments of my University, seeking participants and asking individuals in these departments to kindly forward my recruitment email to colleagues in other institutions. Interested men contacted me back via email to schedule a phone interview. When an interviewee and I scheduled a particular interview time, I emailed that interviewee an electronic copy of the Participant Informed Consent.

All interviews were conducted by phone, which allowed for participants from a wide range of geographic locations to be represented in the data. Despite the elimination of nonverbal communication, research shows that data from face-to-face and telephone interviews is often highly consistent (see, e.g., Aziz & Kenford, 2004; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Moreover,

Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) concluded that telephone interviews can be used productively in qualitative research, and are preferable in some situations (e.g., when the study is about sensitive topics, when interviewees are hard to reach, and when researcher safety or cost are concerns). Sturges and Hanrahan further pointed out that technological advances should change the way we do research, and that with technology, research can fit better into the lives of interviewees. My dissertation project fit these parameters, as conducting phone interviews certainly made scheduling interviews with people dispersed around the country much easier and more financially practical.

Interviewees consented to the interview and the audio taping of the interview verbally during the digitally recorded interview. I conducted a total of 33 interviews, with individual interviews varying in length from 25 to 85 minutes. Interviews were recorded through a phone service and were digitally downloaded from the site with a secure password known only by me, and were then transcribed. All individual names, companies, and locations were changed to pseudonyms or were deleted entirely to protect the privacy of participants.

Participants. The men recruited for this study were computer scientists and engineers who volunteered to be interviewed. Participating men ranged in age from 22 to 71. The majority of interviewees (26 men) identified as white, 2 identified as Asian, 1 identified as African American, 1 identified as Latino, 1 identified as European, and 2 identified as biracial. These interviewees had a wide array of experiences and perceptions of leaves of absence. 21 of the interviewees (64%) were fathers and 12 (36%) were not. The distinction I originally made between computer scientists and engineers turned out to be unhelpful, because many interviewees identified simultaneously as both computer scientists and engineers or had previous experience as one or the other.

Data Analysis

For all researchers, data analysis is about interpretation. For qualitative and feminist researchers, in particular, interpretation is laden with any number of influencers, including values, Discourses, power, relationships, and contexts. Qualitative and feminist researchers believe that because qualitative data are produced in relational contexts, they should be recorded and interpreted in the same way. Viewed in this way, interviews are performances that should not be stripped of context during analysis. Qualitative and feminist researchers make choices at each step of the research process, including data management, data reduction, and conceptual development. As Borland (1991) explained,

> for feminists, the issue of interpretive authority is particularly problematic, for our work often involves a contradiction. On the one hand, we seek to empower the women we work with by revaluing their perspectives, their lives, and their art in a world that has systematically ignored or trivialized women's culture. On the other, we hold an explicitly political vision of the structural conditions that lead to particular social behaviors, a vision that our field collaborators, many of whom do not consider themselves feminists, may not recognize as valid. (p. 64)

For example, Borland (1991) described an example of interviewing her grandmother, who shared a narrative with Borland and then felt that Borland's interpretation of that narrative was completely incorrect. Borland's example demonstrates classic tensions for feminist qualitative scholars, including how we represent our participants' words, who has the "textual authority" once the words are on paper, and how to accommodate feminist commitments *and* our research collaborators. In light of these tensions, successfully handling data analysis in a

feminist qualitative study requires reflexivity and an attempt to view narratives, interviews, and accounts from the participants' points of view.

To this end, I tried to balance my own agenda of emancipation with the actual words and feelings of my interviewees. I worked hard to hear what the interviewees were saying, even when it conflicted with what I hoped to hear or thought I would hear. As such, I have attempted to make sure that the voices of my interviewees are represented in this dissertation, and that I captured the nuanced and sometimes conflictual accounts of the interviewees' experiences.

To begin analyzing the data for this dissertation, I listened carefully for emerging themes as I collected data. These themes became the rough categorizations for the study. In this way, my technique is much like the "wave technique" described by Lindlof and Taylor (2002, p. 214), an inductive approach that allows categories to emerge from the data.

Additionally, Strauss and Corbin's (1990) *grounded theory* was employed, but with careful deliberation and consideration. Grounded theory was used here to contend with new experiences late in the study that continued to shape the project. The inductive analysis of grounded theory occurred throughout the data collection and analysis process, and, hence, certainly shaped the research and interview questions throughout. For example, questions that were particularly illuminating were asked in most interviews while questions that did not connect well with interviewees were dropped.

After the interviews were fully transcribed, I created a rough first list of coding categories. Combined with the data pulled from the popular texts, this initial effort produced 52 codes. As I finished coding the interviews, I eliminated codes that had minimal data and combined some codes that seemed similar. I went through this process two more times before arriving at the findings presented in Chapter 5. Coding in iterations allowed me to switch

between broad, preliminary codes to more detailed codes that were evident across and through the interviews. Additionally, because I was interested in uncovering latent meanings, absent or missing Discourses, gendered tensions, and discursive resources, the use of grounded theory afforded me the opportunity to recode multiple times until the coding scheme represented the data.

Researcher Positionality

As required for sound feminist qualitative research, my own standpoint in relation to my research questions is important. I have already discussed in detail my ontological and epistemological commitments that guide this work; however, my relationship to the particular constructs is also important to *what* I have chosen to study and to *how* I interpreted the data. In particular, I became interested in leave policy after I was laid off from my job as a consultant two days after I announced my first pregnancy. I heard from colleagues that the company felt they couldn't afford my absence. Later, when a client who did not know of my pregnancy hired me, she expressed anger and felt "tricked" when she found out about my "condition." This client *allowed* me to take twelve weeks of unpaid leave, despite the fact that I was not covered under FMLA. However, complications arose in projects at the workplace, and my employer soon asked me to work a few days during my leave, which I did.

My relationship with leaves of absence intensified just before the arrival of my second child. During this pregnancy, I was working for the University as a Teaching Assistant. There are currently no University policies or provisions for students who need leaves of absence. In order to allow for time to give birth and care for my new infant, I had to take an entire semester off of teaching (which meant lost wages and necessitated me paying thousands of dollars in tuition for classes that were previously covered through my teaching contract) and also enrolled

in one class because there were no provisions for students to take a semester off. One University employee even suggested that I apply for a Study Abroad leave in order to obtain the necessary permission to leave the University for a semester, however, this process seemed like more trouble than taking and paying for a single class. These personal experiences with leave undoubtedly shaped my assumptions that leave policy and practice is problematic for women and that it requires reform.

Another experience that has shaped my perception of leaves of absence is my view of my partner's experience with leave. At the birth of our first child, my partner took all of his vacation time and sick time (a total of less than three weeks) to help me recover, to adjust to the new familial addition, and to bond with our daughter. At the birth of our second child, however, he returned to work just two hours after the birth and then worked three half-weeks, so that the impact of his absence at work was not as great. The differences between the two experiences were, in large part, due to the economic pressures we felt as a family. His company had gone through massive layoffs and the threat of losing his job for any reason was real. He knew a few people who had openly taken advantage of family friendly policies and were asked to revert to "normal" 60-hour weeks or to leave the company; others were simply let go. These explicit and implicit Discourses around leaves of absence greatly influenced my partner's decision to forego FMLA and to simply work reduced hours for a short amount of time so that his leave was less visible in his organization. As a result, he experienced stress over working so frequently on so little sleep with a newborn, and was consistently anxious about the possibility of losing his job. This experience made me begin to see how leave reform is necessary not only for women, but also for men, and that leave policy has implications for organizations and families, not simply for individual workers.

Dealing with these experiences during a research project was quite challenging, particularly in light of some data suggesting that men do not want or need leaves of absence. However, there are some techniques that helped alleviate the bias in my own interpretation. First, my interview schedule was designed so that it did not frame leave policy in a negative light. Second, I interviewed both men who have taken leave as well as those who have not taken leave, which provided a variety of perspectives. Lastly, I continually embraced and thought about the importance of reflexivity throughout the project, so that the ways in which I interpreted the data reflected what was actually said in interviews. To this end, I attempted to verify with interviewees the meaning of their stories during the interview, so that I did not unduly apply my own lens to their words. Also, I include in my findings both quotes that support what I thought I might find and also those that contradict my own views. Hence, these strategies help demonstrate the importance of engaging the tension between my own feelings about leave and honoring the feelings of my interviewees.

In this chapter, I have outlined the feminist ontological and qualitative methodological commitments that shape this study. I discussed a number of philosophical tensions that frequently arise when conducting feminist and qualitative research and, in particular, when combining a discursive approach to popular texts and interviews. I also described my use of grounded theory, which allowed for the data analysis to unfold in building iterations. In the next two chapters, I present the findings in their final form.

CHAPTER 5

MACRO DISCOURSES OF PASSION AND COMMITMENT

The words and actions of high profile men in technical occupations provide a context for understanding how the interviewees made sense of their work–life choices. The analysis of the popular texts forms a ground upon which the interview respondents interpret and act. For instance, many interviewees referenced the men profiled in these books when describing their own occupational expectations. These texts illuminated macro Discourses that make possible the discursive resources men in technical occupations use to construct their occupational identities and leave-taking practices. They essentially laid a foundation for forms of talk that the interviewees used.

Conceptually, it is necessary to connect D/discourses. Macro Discourses are broad social narratives embedded in systems of representation. Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) present four frames that represent how scholars study gender and organization. The fourth frame suggests that grand social narratives serve as textual guides that influence and shape identities. They suggest that there is a productive tension between these macro Discourses and the "concrete identity performances [invoked by] popular Discourses of gender and work" that are studied in frame 2 (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 23). These specific frames "hinge on a dynamic conception of power as a constitutive, productive element of gender and organizational Discourse" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 26). Thus, looking at gender and organization from both frames, as I have done in this study, reveals the ways in which people *do* gender in accordance with grand narratives about how they should act.

The micro-macro relationship might also be understood as an agency-structure relationship, a concept that attempts to outline the connection between the conscious behavior of

individuals and the limitations to conscious choice produced by institutions. The interplay between macro Discourses and micro everyday practices is frequently overlooked as many scholars privilege one over the other(Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). In this project, I have tried to capture the way that these grand narratives inform the everyday practices of individuals in technical occupations by drawing out relevant Discourses from scholarly and popular literature. Unearthing powerful Discourses reveals the available scripts by which individual social actors can act. It makes visible the myriad of ways that people might behave in "acceptable ways" and consequently also the ways they might behave which is not "acceptable." However, pulling out Discourses also presents an opportunity for transformation. By making visible the opportunities and constraints afforded to individuals through Discourses, the chance for a re-imagining of how the scripts are written is possible. This approach creates space for both the bodies that perform work but also the institutional and social expectations that are available to people. This is the space from which the opportunity to rewrite the script occurs: where the flesh of actors meets the pressure of Discourse.

For a feminist study, reaching this moment of possible transformation means that an opportunity for emancipation or a lessening of oppression is possible. However, finding the sites and spots of conflict and tension between expectations embedded in macro Discourses and performances in micro everyday behavior is necessary. If a re-imagining of social scripts is to occur, one must first be able to see how power and inequality runs through current versions of performance. Studying individual performances against the backdrop of Discourses allows such a procedure to occur. For a standpoint feminist study, the implicated scripts include not only individual roles, but how expectations, opportunities, and constraints operate according to social location. In other words, Discourses do not influence people in the same ways. The Discourse

of entrepreneurialism, for example, affects working class people and knowledge workers in different ways, just as it moves in gendered ways through all organizational actors.

If grand narratives provide the possibilities of how one might act in accordance with his or her social location, the interplay of D/discourses is also the site of identity construction. As discussed in Chapter 2, identities are the ways in which people understand themselves. People have a variety of experiences, quite dependent upon the particular bodies they inhabit. Factors of social location such as race, class, ability, and gender shape the ways that people view the world, and as such, how they view themselves. Discourses put forth narratives, however, that are applied across social locations. This is particularly problematic when Discourses emerged from and for privileged bodies without consideration of the ways in which it would be applied to others. Specific bodies that do not align with the expectations embedded in Discourses experience conflict. This can create difficulties in enacting identities that are viewed as "acceptable" according to Discursive expectations. For example, these popular texts evidence a Discourse that one should almost always work and should not take time away from work, especially during product development "sprints." However, people with certain disabilities might need to leave work to care for their own health at unplanned times. These competing needs can create a disconnect in identity, as these individuals attempt to perform up to the Discursive expectations about how people should perform work. Thus identity is constructed through these conflicts of D/discourse and is dependent upon social location.

The interplay between macro Discourses and discursive resources used by men in technical occupations is important to unpack as there are striking similarities between the ways in which technical occupational identity and leave-taking practices are framed. In addition, many interviewees drew upon the words and actions of the men profiled in these books and

regularly drew upon the entrepreneurialism that is prevalent in the books. For example, one interviewee referred to "the greats" when explaining how he wanted to be as influential as Bill Gates and Steve Jobs. This interviewee not only mentioned the icons as men, but also referenced their work-life practices as models for career success. Another interviewee also referenced both Gates and Jobs, and explained that he personally did not have an obsessively dedicated work ethic, like Gates and Jobs, which he perceived as a required characteristic to achieve global success. Other interviewees referred to policies at Apple, Microsoft, and Google. These iconic men and their companies provide textual guides for men in technical occupations. A few men talked about the books reviewed for this study specifically by title, and seemed to connect the practices in the books to their own "choices" at work. In this way, the men in this study largely performed their identities in accordance with the broad narratives presented in the texts. Others called upon famous quotes and rumors about the men profiled in these books as evidence to support various points they made when describing their personal work-life practices.

My analysis of these books revealed three main Discourses that served as guiding information for the interviewees: (1) that technical *occupations* are unique; (2) that technical *people* are unique and; (3) that leaves of absence, for any reason except burnout, are not acceptable. In this chapter, I will provide textual excerpts from nine books written by or about male CEOs and company founders that evidence these three Discourses, including: Paul Allen, cofounder of Microsoft; Steve Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft; Sergey Brin, cofounder of Google; Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com; Bill Gates, cofounder of Microsoft; Steve Jobs, cofounder of Apple; Larry Page, cofounder of Google; John Sculley, former CEO of Apple; and Steve Wozniak, cofounder of Apple.

Technical Occupations are Unique

First, most texts supported the Discourse that technical *occupations* are unique from other occupations because they offer employees the opportunity to change the world and because they require an excessive time commitment. Most of the icons profiled claimed to love their jobs specifically because of the opportunity to change the world, and positioned their excessive work hours as a price they would gladly pay for the *privilege* to change the world.

Changing the World

The icons profiled suggested that their work had a higher purpose, and often referred to this higher purpose as a calling or a destiny to change the world. In one memorable example, when trying to convince John Sculley to leave PepsiCo and join Apple, Steve Jobs famously asked, "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or do you want a chance to change the world?" (Isaacson, 2011, p. 154; Sculley & Byrne, 1987). Once there, Sculley noted the intensity of the way Apple employees "wanted to change the world" (Sculley & Byrne, 1987, p. 85). As another example, Wozniak also lived this mantra. In the closing pages of his book, he explained why he wrote his memoirs, claiming that he did so in order to give advice to people like him who want to know how to "actually set about changing the world" (Wozniak & Smith, 2006, p. 289). In another prominent example, Page noted that he always dreamed of doing great things, making a difference, and changing the world. Page claimed that he and Brin founded Google to do just that: change the world. Additionally, the stories in these texts give literal examples of changing the world, including changes instigated through the invention of personal computers, and improvements in international communication channels, space travel, and nuclear technology.

However, the Discourse of changing the world was prevalent not only in discussions of invention and innovation, but also in the everyday activities of individual workers. In these examples, changing the world acted as a guiding mantra in the everyday activities and the personal philosophies of the figures in the texts and, as such, was promoted in their companies and passed on to employees throughout the industry. In doing so, this Discourse was positioned as if technical occupations had a special quality that offered employees the opportunity to affect the world. Having the opportunity to change the world is not a narrative that translates for people in all social positions. It carries with it, for example, a specifically classed notion of professional success. However, it has pervaded technical occupational identity as if it did not carry such assumptions. Quite simply, not everyone will have the chance to change the world, but this Discourse about changing the world through technical innovation is described as if it is for all technical workers, despite the embedded assumptions which make changing the world an impossibility for many workers. The Discourse of changing the world, however, was positioned as requiring a fierce dedication to work.

Excessive Work Hours

The popular texts provided ample examples of intense work hours, and positioned this requirement as unique to technical occupations. As such, most of the examples of extreme time commitments were offered with some advice that workers who did not favor such hours should find another career. For instance, Amazon employees were required to work extremely long hours with high productivity, and customer service representatives dropping below seven emails a minute were regularly fired. Amazon employees would work until two or three in the morning in the early days, and in general, the Amazon staff was considered overworked. Bezos, however, had “no empathy for employees who complain about working long hours in pursuit of his quest

[and] often pushed his people . . . It was not uncommon [for his employees] to work twelve hour days, seven days a week" (Brandt, 2011, p. 168–169). This example of intense dedication was typical in the technical organizations studied and was articulated throughout the popular texts.

Other texts described the intense examples of hard work and long days that employers set for their employees. For example, Lowe (1998) described,

> Microsoft is infamous for working its employees hard—but few work harder than Bill Gates himself. Between 1978 and 1984 Gates took only 15 days off work…The cafeteria at Microsoft headquarters in Redmond is open until midnight to allow for people who work late. (p. 37)

Accommodating people who worked late hours reflected Gates' expectations for long work hours. Indeed, Gates asserted, "If you don't like to work hard and be intense and do your best, this is not the place to work" (Lowe, 1998, p. 37). Gates' words hark entrepreneurialist ideology, whereby employees who do not "work hard and be intense" are not good employees at Microsoft. Wallace and Erickson (1992) also described how the intense requirement for time worked was perpetuated by Gates. Wallace and Erickson claimed that Gates would regularly sleep in the office and that employees were often required to work 20-hour days. They also shared a story that Gates required employees to park in the order they arrived, and as a result, employees did not want to be seen leaving before the person who arrived before them. Additionally, Wallace and Erickson claimed that

> Beginning in 1984, Microsoft managers secretly began using the E-Mail system to determine which hourly employees were working on weekends…This information was retrieved and then used by the company to determine employee bonuses" (1992, p. 276)

Maxwell (2002) corroborated this account of Microsoft and noted, “During the Windows Death March, it wasn’t unusual to have programmers sleeping in their cubicles” (p. 109).

These, and many other, stories and examples of an intense time commitment filled the pages of the popular texts. In a final memorable example, Apple employees made t-shirts that said “90 hours a week and loving it!” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 124). Although their time requirements were extreme, workers typically expected long hours as part of their occupation. The texts did not address whether or not such hours were necessary, only how workers pushed beyond their human barriers (e.g., sleep and hygiene) to work around the clock.

This Discourse of an excessive time commitment is purported without regard to the ways in which it is gendered, raced, and classed. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, employed women carry a disproportionate responsibility for care work which may make excessive time commitments at work impossible. However, expectations of time, communicated to technical employees through Discourses do not account for the social locations of the individuals who consume the Discourses and attempt to act accordingly.

People in Technical Occupations are Unique

Through these texts, a second guiding Discourse emerged: that *people* in technical occupations are unique. These texts suggest that not only are technical occupations unique, but also, the people who seek them out are somehow different than other people (i.e., those that do not work in technical occupations). This particular Discourse was largely evidenced through employers’ and employees’ talk about destiny and passion.

The concept of destiny frequently was evoked to explain how the iconic figures represented in these texts were “meant for” their occupations. The idea that some people are destined for technical work became evident when the icons described that they took on their

occupational identities during childhood. Wozniak, for example, started learning about electronics before he was four years old. He claimed,

> Now, I was, of course, too young at that point to decide that I wanted to be an engineer. That came a few years later. I hadn't even been exposed to science fiction or books about inventors yet, but just then, at that moment, I could see . . . [that] it was important and good. (Wozniak & Smith, 2006, p. 13).

Although Wozniak could not articulate that his career would be in engineering, he understood that this early exposure started his life as an engineer. Wozniak later expanded on this thought and explained, "this much I know for sure: I was meant to be an engineer who designs computers, an engineer who writes software, an engineer who tells jokes, and an engineer who teaches other people things" (p. 119). Although he discussed and credited his father with exposing him early to electronics, he described his occupational path as a destiny.

In a similar example, Lowe (2009) claimed of Brin and Page, "to say Sergey and Larry were trained from birth for what they became does not diminish the vast importance or meaning of what they have done" (p. 3) and that "they both were groomed from childhood for the journey they would take [because] their destiny evolved from their origins" (p. 22). The notion of "grooming" implies that the parents of Brin and Page played a role in the occupational paths their sons would take; however, destiny is again harkened as reason for occupational success. The notion that great icons were destined for their occupations was referenced about the icons and also from the icons themselves. To do so, these icons regularly spoke about their childhood interest in technical work. For example, Gates taught himself how to program a computer at age 13 (Lowe, 1998) and P. Allen started his technical experience around age 9 (P. Allen, 2011).

Both men obtained actual jobs writing programs in the ninth and tenth grades, at 14 and 15 years old (Lowe, 1998). As another example, Sculley claimed that he

> loved tinkering with electrical things as a child . . . By the time I was ten, my friends and I were taking radios apart to convert them into intercoms, and we were building remote controlled robots with used radio components, erector sets and other old, discarded parts…I became a ham radio operator at the age of eleven. (Sculley & Byrne, 1987, p. 79)

As these examples evidence, the men in these texts regularly attributed their early beginnings as technical workers to their childhoods, emphasizing that their early beginnings were signs of a technical destiny and largely identifying themselves as technical people long before they actually attained technical jobs.

A second way that the popular texts discursively emphasized the uniqueness of technical people was through the notion of passion. Many of the icons profiled characterized themselves and others as extremely passionate, obsessive, or otherwise totally entwined with their occupations. Jobs, for example, was well known for his passion. Jay Elliot, an Apple employee hired by Jobs claimed, "[Jobs'] obsession is a passion for the product, a passion for product perfection" (Isaacson, 2011, p. 83). As another example, musician Wynton Marsalis described Jobs as, "a man possessed," explaining, "After a while, I started looking at him and not the computer, because I was so fascinated with his passion" (Isaacson, 2011, p. 402). Jobs himself explained, "My passion has been to build an enduring company where people were motivated to make great products. Everything else was secondary" (Isaacson, 2011, p. 568). Indeed, Jobs' passion for his work rigorously eclipsed other pursuits in his life.

In a similar high profile example, Gates was so obsessed with computers that "his parents ordered him to take a leave of absence from computers, which he did" (Lowe, 1998, p. 11). Gates stepped away from computers for some months at his parents' request, but returned with rigorous zeal after his "leave." As such, Wallace and Erickson (1992) claimed, "even as a child Gates had an obsessive personality" (p. 12). They also noted that Gates could not explain his fascination with "his own 'wonder,' the computer. But it triggered a deep passion, an obsession, in him" (p. 22).

This dance between passion and obsession was a characterization noted about most of the icons in the popular texts analyzed, and it also was a trait that these icons sought to inspire in others. Sculley and Byrne (1987) asserted that Apple employees exhibited "so much passion in their eyes [that] they were mesmerized, possessed almost, by what they were doing; they were universally young, passionate, idealistic, and brilliant" (p. 85). This kind of passion was considered a desirable trait for employees at all levels of the organization. Hence, not only did the data reveal that technical work inspires extreme passion, but it also revealed that many technical workers consider themselves as technical people from birth. This presumed "fit" between a (subjective) talent and interest and an (objective) set of tasks in an occupation is ripe for critique.

The popular texts also provided some examples of how the icons were so passionate for work that their technical identities superseded other identities. For example, because of his dedication to work, Jobs abandoned his pregnant girlfriend and ignored his daughter. He felt that technical innovation was his destiny—not parenting--and initially did not want anything to do with his first-born daughter, Lisa (Isaacson, 2011). In fact, Jobs' relationships with all his daughters were distant, as he would often ignore them completely. Jobs' wife, Laurene Powell,

explained, “he focuses on his work, and [as a result] at times he has not been there for the girls” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 283).

Jobs’ mentor, John Scully showed a similar preference for his work-self. Scully explained,

> I left Leezy and our daughter, Laura, back east for the first five months…because I knew I had to immerse myself in the new job…I would get up at 4:30am every morning, run along El Camino Real, and work at Apple from 7:00 a.m. until 10:00 or 11:00 p.m. (p. 130–131)…Because it was a seven-day-a-week job, Leezy left for our home in Maine for the summer. She realized she would see little of me over the next few months (Scully & Byrne, 1987, p. 288)

Leaving his family in another state is evidence of the weight Scully put upon his occupational identity. Together, these examples suggest that one’s technical identity should be above other identities, particularly familial roles. As such, this Discourse complicates moves to take leaves of absence from organizations.

Leaves Are Not Appropriate for Technical Workers

A final Discourse drawn out through the popular texts is that leaves are not appropriate for technical workers who want to continue in their occupations. Three key stories suggested that leaves of absence were not supported. First, at Microsoft, P. Allen became seriously ill with Hodgkin’s lymphoma and began to reduce the hours he put into Microsoft. P. Allen (2011) claimed, “instead of doing the sane thing and taking a leave, I went into the office a few afternoons a week, just to keep my hand in. That was the no-excuses Microsoft culture: relentless commitment to work” (p. 162). That P. Allen would take some days off work went against the work ethic of Gates and Microsoft. As such, although he was receiving radiation

treatments at the time, P. Allen was criticized by his peers and employees for slacking off (Wallace & Erickson, 1992). For example, Gates and Ballmer were overheard talking about P. Allen when he took time off to recover; P. Allen (2011) described,

> One evening in late December 1982, I heard Bill and Steve speaking heatedly in Bill's office and paused outside to listen in. It was easy to get the gist of the conversation. They were bemoaning my recent lack of production and discussing how they might dilute my Microsoft equity by issuing options to themselves and other shareholders. Steve and Bill both formally apologized . . . Sometimes it seemed that Bill so utterly identified with Microsoft that he'd get confused about where the company left off and he began. I didn't feel quite the same way. (p. 168)

This moment was a turning point for P. Allen and marked one reason why he left Microsoft. This example quite clearly shows that Microsoft was intolerant of leaves of absence, however P. Allen, himself a technical icon, did very much support leaves of absence. P. Allen went on to engage in a barrage of nonwork activities, including scuba diving, owning a basketball team (which he insisted was for fun), space exploration programs, and exotic travel. As P. Allen's time away from work was not tolerated, he subsequently left the organization. Thus in this example, there was an opportunity to resist the dominant Discourse that leaves of absence are not acceptable because P. Allen himself took time off. However, because P. Allen quit, and claimed that one reason was because of the pressure around his leave-taking experience, the Discourse that leaves of absence are unacceptable persisted. Workers learning from this example would get the message that leaves are unacceptable and that if a leave was necessary, so too was quitting.

The Microsoft texts produced another example of how the Microsoft organization did not support leaves of absence. For instance, when manager Ida Cole awarded one employee two

weeks of paternity leave, Gates informed her that her decision was “unwise” (Lowe, 1998, p. 293). At the time, Microsoft did not have a policy for leaves of absence, despite the fact that FMLA passed in 1993. Cole eventually left the company.

For the most part, the only time leaves of absence were positioned as acceptable was when employees were “burned out”. Ballmer, for example, offered sabbaticals when employees were burned out (Maxwell, 2002). The counter Discourse of sabbaticals as a supported means to fight burnout was prevalent in many texts. This is quite contradictory, as it gives acceptable reason and support to people to take leaves from their organizations. Ultimately, this practice problematic because it suggests that some reasons that people take leave are acceptable (e.g., those that support business objectives) while others (e.g. family responsibilities) are not acceptable.

The concept of burnout was evoked when describing the breaking point of employees after a “sprint,” or a big push in product development characterized by intense work hours. Sometimes burnout was evoked when describing people with drinking or drug problems, people who might otherwise quit because of their exhaustion or health, or people experiencing extreme family crises, such as a pending divorce. Dealing with burnout, then, was largely positioned as a organizational or occupational issue, and as something that could be managed.

Time off for burnout, however, was not always cast as acceptable. A telling example emerged from the Apple texts when Andy Hertzfeld, Jobs’ friend and a software engineer on the Macintosh team, took an approved and supported leave of absence to recover from a near burnout after the push for the Macintosh roll out. Isaacson (2011) explained that while he was gone, Hertzfeld

> learned that Jobs had given out bonuses of up to $50,000 to engineers on the Macintosh team. So he went to Jobs to ask for one. Jobs responded that [Hertzfeld's manager] had decided not to give the bonuses to people who were on leave. Hertzfeld later heard that the decision had actually been made by Jobs. (p. 190)

Jobs seemed to be disciplining Hertzfeld for taking a leave of absence. However, in later years, Jobs would take many medical leaves when fighting cancer, although he routinely worked during his leaves and continued to be very involved in the company while technically on leave. These, and other, stories in the popular texts make clear that organizational environments unsupportive of leave are a commonplace.

Because the stigma of leaves of absence was great, one way that men could create space for their families and other nonwork pursuits was to quit their jobs and take time off before joining another company. For example, P. Allen (2011) described his ultimate departure from Microsoft in order to take time to recover from his illness, and, similarly, Wozniak claimed "I had two small children at home…I thought, You know what? There are a lot of engineers in the world and I've got kids" (2006, p. 274). Both P. Allen and Wozniak found their organizations were not accommodating to their needs for recovery from illness and parenting, and as a result, experienced some animosity during their departures. Remaining in their organizations while making time for their health and children led to animosity and disciplining from their peers. As such, both men left their organizations to have more time for the nonwork aspects of their lives.

In addition to these explicit examples about leaves of absence, there were many places in the texts suggesting that the work–life distinction was not relevant or useful for true technical workers. Because work was life and life was work, the division between the two did not explain life for many of the icons profiled. For example, Jobs said, "I sent emails to groups of people at

2 a.m. and batted things around…We think about this a lot because it's not a job, it's our life" (Isaacson, 2011, p. 532). As another example, one of Google's stated employee benefits includes the following: "Work and play are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to code and pass the puck at the same time" (Lowe, 2009, p. 170). When work is cast as life, work looks more like life than traditional conceptions of work. As a final example from the popular texts, Lowe (1998) asserted, "While Microsofties often work up to 80-hour weeks, they also play hockey in the hallways, trick each other, play their musical instruments at work…and have fun" (p. 65). Thus, the overlap between work and life was such that any division between the two seemed arbitrary.

In summary, the profiles of iconic figures in technical occupations serve as a context from which technical workers made sense of their everyday work–life practices. The popular texts analyzed here revealed three important Discourses that provide context for how decisions and policies about leaves of absence are settled in technical organizations, including (1) that technical occupations are unique; (2) that technical people are unique, particularly through their technical destiny and passion; and (3), that leaves of absence are almost always unacceptable in technical occupations. In the next chapter, I will expound the findings from the interviews, which can be interpreted in light of the contexts presented here.

CHAPTER 6

MICRO ENACTMENTS AND DISCURSIVE RESOURCES

In this chapter, I present the findings to the research questions. I discuss themes that emerged in the data and provide exemplary quotes from both interviews and popular texts that best explicate the findings. As such, this chapter is organized this chapter by the three research questions so that the findings are presented in accordance to how they "answered" each specific research questions.

Research Question One: (How) Do Male Computer Scientists and Engineers Construct Their Occupational Identity?

The first research question asked about the ways that computer scientists and engineers construct their occupational identities. Clear patterns emerged through the data and revealed three main findings: (1) the technical workers examined in this study felt an overwhelming love for their work, particularly as it allowed the opportunity to save or change the world; (2) technical workers have an incredible passion; and (3), workers' their technical identities were either innate or stemmed from childhood, and frequently presided over other identities and roles.

Technical Work is Beloved

When describing their work, interviewees frequently said things such as "I love my job" and "we have a pretty awesome job." One interviewee explained, "I'm in a field and in a job that I just love," and other echoed, "I think the people…[take] a lot of satisfaction from the work." Interviewees often repeated these kinds of sentiments throughout the data. In particular, participants tended to perceive themselves as lucky to have landed in such a great job, and commented regularly about the benefits and love they experienced from their work. For instance, Richard explained that his love for his job made life fun. He explained,

> the first fifteen years was purely technical. I was having so much fun working on very exciting projects and doing inventions and getting patents and all that that I didn't, they kept asking me to get into management, but I was having too much fun on the technical side.

The data also revealed a number of reasons as to why men in technical occupations loved their jobs, including the potential to: solve problems; act on creative impulses; work with cutting edge technologies; and work in exciting, relaxed, competitive, or flexible environments. However, the reasons presented were frequently contradictory and reflected a wide range of views on technical work. Regardless of how the work was characterized, the men in this study regularly described how much they loved their occupations.

In particular, one of the most consistent ways that the men in this study explained their love for their jobs was to emphatically characterize technical work as changing the world. The notion that technical work did indeed save or change the work remained unchallenged, and was presented in the interview dialogue as an obvious answer to why the men entered technical occupations or why they liked their work. This Discourse was used to justify men's individual "choices" to enter technical occupations and functioned as a way to bolster the importance and prestige of the field.

For example, A.J. explained

> The technical world—it's special. It's special because in a sense, well not in a sense, because engineering and science are two of the oldest crafts or sciences known to man—some people even argue they are older than art. In different times in history, technology is referred to as magic and witchcraft or sorcery or whatever, but it's just science. You look back at our ancient pre species, right, they invented fire, and people argue that is

> engineering, to be able to develop a fire. And so, it's like one of the oldest crafts or arts known to man. As the people build knowledge upon knowledge, over time, we've gotten to live and enjoy a world in which we have homes, heating, television, cell phones, computers, airplanes, space crafts, boats, ships, and everything that people can enjoy as far as modern livelihood, and people attribute that to science and engineering.

For A.J., engineering is seen as an enduring occupation that has molded and changed the world throughout time. When A.J. said, "the technical word—it's special. It's special because in a sense, well not in a sense," he was referring to the hypothetical idea that the technical world is special, but quickly recounted to indicate that the technical world was actually special for its contributions.

Doug expressed a similar idea when explaining why he didn't mind working extensive hours. He claimed,

> It's going to be that blank canvas, that ability that allows you to create almost anything and take it a step further. Certain people want to create great products and great things, like write great code, that other people use that in some way helps the world.

Doug went on to describe his work as an art that was uniquely suited for individuals who had both the desire and drive to help the world.

As these examples illustrate, employees placing the contributions of technical workers in the grand context of the world occurred regularly and with ease. Such phrases as "the opportunity to change the world" flowed from interviewees with little hesitation. As such, these Discourses indicated that such talk was a regular occurrence in the context of technical occupations.

It is unknown whether or not the men in this study created products that actually changed the world. Many workers worked on projects and products that are well known and likely changed some aspect of human life. In many ways, the icons presented in the popular texts created products that changed or saved the world. Additionally, it is likely that while some of the interviewees made similar contributions, others have drawn upon this Discourse because of its pervasive presence within technical occupations. Hence, from this perspective, technical innovation makes the world a better place.

Interviewee Richard certainly agreed. When describing what attracted him to IT, Richard explained his desire to save his country and benefit the world through technical innovation, and described,

> I graduated high school in 1958, which was right after Russia launched the Sputnik satellite and the mood in the country at that time was that we were going to have Russian tanks rumbling down the streets of America because we had an inadequate number of engineers. So, the high school class of '58 became one of the largest enrollments in engineering colleges in the country.

For Richard, engineering was a way to serve his country; while he asserted that there were many ways to serve one's country, he also claimed that engineering was among the most helpful. Richard shared that he and most of his peers talked about saving lives every day at work during long shifts, and that they viewed their work as engineers as a noble cause that contributed to the well being on the country.

Painting technical occupations as the site for grandiose contributions was also evident in a final example. Interviewee Barry compared programming to the movie *Jurassic Park*, which is set on an island where scientists have created prehistoric life. Barry explained,

> It's like *Jurassic Park.* That programmer was *it*. I mean he wrote everything for the park, and if he left, it was over. I think many companies, even large companies, even more so now that the economy's not doing real well, are pretty much dependent on this one person to do this one thing that is very important, and they aren't leaving until it's done. The success of everything depends on this one person. Tech is like that. You get to be the one to create the island.

Here Barry explains how technical innovation is directly responsible for creating or sustaining an entire island, because without the programmer, the island would fail. He explicitly compared the programmer's importance in maintaining an island with a programmer's importance in maintaining an organization.

These comments, and many others, reveal employees' experiences of the distinct sense of purpose and importance that technical work provides. Because of this pervasive ideology, many workers in this study discussed how this notion of changing the world represented a vital life purpose. Moreover, this ideology was positioned as carrying significance for all of humanity and was often described as a service to society.

However, as discussed in Chapter 5, the opportunity to change the world is explicated as if it is available to all workers who are smart and work excessively hard, yet these expectations are impossible for some people. That the men in this study mostly arrived in their technical positions from relatively or explicitly privileged social positions was overlooked. The prevailing ideology about changing the world assumes that the opportunity is through hard work, not social location, which is problematic when individuals occupy positions in technical occupations who do not have the same privileges embedded in their lives.

Technical Work Inspires Extreme Passion

The second main finding for the first research question about how male computer scientists and engineers construct their occupational identity is that these men consider both themselves and other technical workers to exhibit an extreme passion for their occupations. For example, interviewee Oliver described his peers as, "all having fun and [being] really interested in [and] very passionate about what they're doing." In a similar move, Barry explained that

> The real technical types [are] pretty much focused on their technical issues, and that's pretty much life to them . . . They really like doing what they're doing. I mean it's almost an obsession. I find that that is true with quite a few technical people in this industry: they're almost obsessed with doing it and almost everything else is blocked out.

Describing an extreme passion as an obsessive tendency is one way that the men in this study described themselves and others in their occupations. Interviewee Adam further explained, "the industry draws people of a certain personality or certain personalities that tend to forgo work–life balance, so people who are too passionate about what they are working on cannot let go." The inability to "let go" of problems until they are resolved was consistently described in terms of passion and obsession.

Similarly, interviewee Peter explained

> It's like it's an itch you've got to scratch, but it's not bad. I mean it's just [that] I'm happy to have something that I'm that passionate about. And it's just like sometimes you just sort of have to deliberately put the brakes on it and say, 'Look, you know, it's sunny. I'll go out.' Otherwise, you would just keep working and might never see the sun all day.

As Peter's example illustrated, forcing themselves to leave unresolved problems was an issue that many interviewees brought up, although it was usually presented as a characteristic of

technical people. As another example, Michael explained that obsession was a positive quality necessary for solving problems. He explained,

> I think what's most important is—what's the best way to say it—is being obsessive, really. I think that what you have to do to be really successful in programming, in my mind, is to just be extremely focused on what the problem is [that] you're trying to solve and, when you come across errors in what you've done, figuring out exactly what the errors are.

Thus, technical work was frequently positioned as focused around solving problems, and solving problems was often positioned as addicting.

In another example, Jesse explained,

> It's something maybe like a focus type thing where it's like you [have] to do it and finish, and finish, and finish, and keep on, and keep on, and keep on, and keep on. You know, you get hooked and you can't get out of it . . . it's a matter of conquering it I guess, a quest. And, you can't stop and it's addicting.

As Jesse's example describes, this addicting, obsessive nature of technical work was positioned to come out of extreme passion.

In a final example, Richard explained that passion was a trait he looked for when hiring new employees. He described,

> I interviewed a lot of people, hired a lot of people at [a large company] and my number one thing was trying to find out what people's passion was. I wanted them to have a passion for whatever occupation—be it if I was hiring an electrical engineer, mechanical engineers, computer science, programmers, whatever—I wanted those people to have a dying passion for what it is they did and what they wanted to do. Because if I could line

> up their work with their passion, then basically we would just let them go [and] they would just work unbelievable hours and accomplish tremendous things. A person's passion was what I tried to find out and utilize . . . When people find passion and they just can get consumed by it and they just pour themselves into it, to the detriment of anything on the side of the equation [like] their family life or any other outside activities, that makes a great employee.

Richard further explained that technical occupations had a particular way of creating this kind of passion. He described,

> It's easy to find dedicated people in engineering [because] we like to solve problems and we don't give up. There is the expectation that you will be passionate about your work. I am and I hire people who are.

Richard detailed his own passion for engineering throughout the interview and maintained that finding potential employees with passion was a valuable endeavor. He explained passion in an entrepreneurialist way, suggesting that with true passion comes incredible personal commitment to career success.

In general, the interviewees described themselves and their peers as passionate about their work. They shared stories and hypothetical examples of passionate, and even obsessive behavior that characterized the work of men in technical occupations. This drive and focus to solve problems and inability to let go of unsolved problems seemed to fuel these employees' passion, which was presented as a unique characteristic of men in technical occupations.

Technical Identity is Natural or Developed in Childhood

The third finding answering the first research question about how male computer scientists and engineers construct their occupational identity is that the men in this study

frequently described technical identities as innate, natural conditions. Participants described people who work in technical occupations as largely a unique "type of person." For example, Shawn claimed, "there really are very distinct types of people that go into different fields of engineering. And that's because it requires a different approach to thinking and a different perspective on the way that we see things around us." Similarly, Jeff explained, "we are a very unique breed. You're going to find there's a personality factor that some of us have and some of you don't."

Additionally, references to technical workers as "types" of people were quite prevalent throughout the data. In many cases, the assumed naturalness of a "technical mind" or a "particular personality profile" that is suitable for technical work was an unchallenged assumption in much of the talk. For example, one interviewee explained the natural occurrence of such a type, and explained,

> There are certain people born for this kind of work. It isn't for everyone. [Either] you are born with a technical mind or you aren't. [Either] you are born to tinker and fix things, or you might be born to be a banker. Not everyone can do what I do. We all have our given strengths and weaknesses. I was lucky that I was born with an aptitude for this kind of work and that I like it.

This interviewee explained the need for a "natural aptitude" throughout his interview, and suggested that technical prowess was a "given strength" for some people, but not for others.

While many men described their technical abilities in terms of a natural talent, others described these abilities as developing during childhood. For example, Jesse explained,

> Honestly I think this is a childhood issue [in that it is] part of something in how those people develop into technical people [and that] it's already there when you're a kid. I

> think how you are born and your childhood may have something to do with how people get into the industry depending on, you know, who they were. It's kind of hard to explain, but you see some people that are very good in school and just that's what they do and who they are. They're going to be the best at what they do and that's all they know. And, that could be I guess true also for lawyers or teachers or whoever. But, I know that the technical people are a little bit special. Not everyone is born like this.

In Jesse's view, successful technical workers had a unique, innate ability for technical work that was evidenced throughout childhood. It was an identity that some people "had." The uncritiqued use of identity as something one "has" rather than something that is constructed through D/discursive intersections is problematic and disregards social locations. This kind of discursive move perpetuates inequality in organizations.

In another example, Bruce described his belief that the capacity for technical work is evidenced in childhood. He explained,

> I can say I was born for this kind of work. When I was a kid, I always had a strong enjoyment for it, even at a young age [while] making models [or] just hav[ing] fun from playing with things and taking things apart and putting them back together.

The notion that the capacity for technical work is innate was prevalent throughout the data. While most men in this study agreed that there are a variety of people in technical occupations, they distinguished between people in these jobs and "exceptional" people who were born for technical work. For example, one interviewee explained, "there's a huge gap between mediocre programmers and exceptional programmers, and the exceptional ones come from pasts and childhoods where they were the ones who tinkered with things and took things apart."

Moreover, some interviewees explained that technical work is so ingrained in them that it wouldn't matter if they entered technical occupations, because they would still be technical people at heart. These men asserted that their technical identities would supersede their actual occupational status. Phillip explained this phenomenon,

> Me and my friends were developers before we became developers for our work. You know, we were engineers and architects, and everything before [we were] in high school and middle school. So, I mean, we can't just not do it. It's who we are. So regardless of what happens at work, you know, you're still going to program at night or sometime.

That Phillip and his friends are developers regardless of their actual occupational status is an idea that was echoed in a number of interviews.

As another example, another interviewee explained,

> You can't just stop being who you are. If I won the lotto, I wouldn't not make websites anymore. I wouldn't not look at the internet anymore . . . I couldn't imagine a situation where I wouldn't want to dive back in. You know, I was always a web developer because it's what I know and it's what's easy for me, but I was actually trained as an air force medic and I did that for a long time, but I never stopped being a web developer. You know, it was always easy. It was just like if I was there, I did it for night time, I just did it for fun, you know? So I guess what I'm saying is that I'm not going to stop because, I don't know, just won't. Why would I?

Similarly, Peter and said, "I'd do it if I weren't paid for it in one way or another." Much of the data reflects this attitude that technical work is an identity that extends beyond the confines of actual job status.

Some of the interviewees expressed that their innate technical identities were more pervasive, enduring, or important than other roles and identities in their lives. For example, Jesse explained simply, "these days, your job reflects who you are." In a similar move, interviewee Christopher explained,

> We live in a culture of America where you are defined by your job. Now that can change. It changed for me that I'm defined, in part, also by my family now, but still I drive my identity, or a lot of my value, by the work that I do. When I was younger and I was unemployed for a while, I felt worthless . . . I felt depressed because I was raised to work in this area. It is me, and I was lost without it.

Christopher's feeling of identity confusion without his career reflected his belief that his occupation defined him. Richard also explained that his occupation completely defined him. He claimed that he became quite depressed when he retired because he no longer knew who he was or what his purpose in life should have been. Another interviewee explained that his identity as a programmer was altered, but not diminished when he became a father, and said,

> I'm forced [to work less hours] now because I have kids. I mean, if I didn't have kids I wouldn't stop at all. I wouldn't want to. I would be on my work 100% in all the time. I mean, I guess I'm at home because I have to be sometimes, so, you know, I can't just be absent. But, really, I was a programmer before I was a dad.

In this example, the interviewee's occupational identity superseded all other identities and roles, including parenting. When pressed to explain this further, the interviewee maintained that his occupational identity did indeed take precedence over other identities in his life. Hence, as explained here, the occupational identities of the men interviewed for this study were frequently characterized as natural, developed during childhood, and/or presiding over other identities.

In this section, I explained how the data answered the first research question, "(How) do male computer scientists and engineers construct their occupational identity?" I described and provided evidence for three main findings: (1) through discursive resources, men in technical occupations described the love they felt for their jobs especially because it allows the opportunity to change the world; (2) the passion or obsession "good" technical workers feel toward their work is important and prevalent; and (3), that technical identities were perceived to be natural identities that were innate or that developed in childhood, and/or identities which regularly took precedence over other identities.

Research Question Two: What (if Any) Discourses Do Male Computer Scientists and Engineers Draw Upon to Describe Their Leave-Taking Practices?

The second research question asked how male computer scientists and engineers explained their leave-taking practices. Interviewees explained their practices in five main ways, including (1) the uniqueness of technical culture complicates leave-taking; (2) that leave practice depends upon the supportive or unsupportive work environment; (3) that work and career are individual responsibilities, so leave depends on individual goals; (4) that gendered expectations preclude men from taking leaves of absence; and (5), that leaves of absence are mitigated by virtual work, vacation time, or quitting.

The Uniqueness of Technical Culture Complicates Leave-taking

The first finding that answers research question two is that technical occupations and technical work were described as unique. In particular, the data revealed that technical work is unique in four ways: (1) the rapid pace of technical work (2) the specialized skills required to succeed, (3) the extreme time requirement, and (4) the demands of project-based work.

Rapid pace of technical work. The rapid pace of technical work was repeatedly cited as a unique characteristic that made men in technical occupations less able to take leaves of absence, as compared to men in other occupations. The notion that "technical work" was something that the men could describe objectively created an interesting background for their analysis. Whether or not technical work itself was a describable "thing" was mostly unquestioned. Rather, taking "technical work" as something to easily recognize and describe was the norm in the interviews. The rapid pace of technical work was regularly cited as a characteristic that makes technical occupations unique. For example, Greg explained,

> Computer languages change, you know, pretty rapidly. The technology, if you look at stuff on the internet, web pages, and that kind of thing, that stuff's changing dramatically from year to year. So, if someone were to take a leave of absence, I think that (1), their skills would diminish just from nonuse, but then (2), that the technology would have advanced and they probably would not have been keeping up because of whatever it was that they were doing instead.

As another example, Christopher described how the rapid pace of technology created a unique inability to leave work,

> [If you leave, the] knowledge you have is obsolete, in comparison to other professions that are based on, like, you know, physicists or biology or medicine [where] you're talking about a wealth of knowledge that is hundreds of years old. When you're talking about IT, you literally are talking about things that change month to month. So, when you fall behind, you can always bring yourself back up, but there is a pause if you stop thinking about it. Starting as a programmer is very, very technical and, now [that I am] going [solely] into program management, I am not nearly the technical guy that I was a

> few years ago. Not even close. I can figure things out on my computer, but it's a major drop in my technical skill. So, that is a very real [problem that] people lose that knowledge by taking the time off.

As yet another example, Oliver echoed these sentiments,

> It's very easy in IT to miss the boat, you know, [and] kind of be left behind because this whole field is moving so fast constantly. I mean, I've been doing this now for 15, yeah, more than 15 years professionally and the technologies that I used when I started and the technologies that are around now have certainly changed quite a bit.

Because technology changes so rapidly, the technical workers in this study perceived an inability to leave for fear that their skills would become obsolete.

As a final example, Jesse described,

> Everything is going so fast. You can literally see technology flying. Like now, with cell phones and computers, and HDTV[3]s, it's like we want more, but we kind of don't realize how much we're paying for what we want. So in essence, we're actually paying more with our lives for what we *think* we need when we probably don't [need those things], you know?

The speed of innovation seems to impact the speed of the work required of employees in technical occupations. The data revealed that this speed created the perception that taking more than two weeks away from work was either impossible or would lead to a lessening of occupational worth by making employees' skills obsolete. Most of the interviewed men

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[3] HDTV refers to high definition television, which provides better resolution than standard definition televisions.

suggested that taking more than a week of leave during a "sprint" or "crunch time" would be detrimental for their projects, work teams, organizations, and personal careers. Thus, leaves of absence were not considered as a possibility.

The speed of technical work was reported to be vitally important in the ways that interviewees understood their occupations and also was offered as a reason for why men in these occupations could not easily take a leave of absence. This characteristic was presented as different from other occupations, which did not consistently rely on new information. In the next section, I will discuss the argument that specialized skills also played a part in distinguishing technical occupations from other occupations.

Specialized skills. Another way that the computer scientists and engineers interviewed for this study claimed that technical occupations' uniqueness made taking leaves of absence difficult was to reference the specialized skills required for such work. Because technical workers frequently have highly specialized and inimitable skills, they are not easily replaced at work. Interviewee Jarvis explained,

> You kind of get into this position as an engineer where you specialize, specialize, specialize, specialize and now all of a sudden you're trapped . . . If you want people with all the latest skills [and] if you become a digital PLL[4] expert, well, if the world doesn't need the right digital PLL, then you're out, and they're going to hire these guys from college who know all about whatever the next thing is that people need [like] LCD[5] touch

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[4] PLL refers to a phase lock loop that is an electronic circuit.

[5] LCD refers to liquid crystal displays, which are flat panel displays or video displays that utilize liquid crystals.

> pads or something. There's not a lot of effort on the part of companies to maintain the people [or] the broad skill sets, I don't think . . . [Companies] focus on getting you to be an expert in whatever it is, and then, if that thing is no longer needed, then we just don't need you anymore, and there's always of plenty of others that we can hire. Or we can lobby congress to get more H1B[6] visas. And, you think, do I really have such a perishable skill set? [But], I think the fact is that [we do]. I mean, you kind of are replaceable, right?

In this example, Jarvis explained that skills are outdated so quickly that it makes it difficult for employees to take leaves of absence. Jarvis described men who took leaves of absence "confident" because he perceived that these men risked their jobs by taking leaves of absence. Thus, they either assumed that they wouldn't lose their jobs, or would get other jobs. Jarvis perceived this as foolish confidence in many cases because "technical jobs are constantly at risk of being outsourced." In addition, Jarvis' unproblematized reference to "these guys from college" references the assumption that new hires will likely be other men.

In a contrary example, interviewee Liam explained how difficult it was to replace technical workers during their temporary leaves. Liam explained,

> I've been here when people have taken leave and it's hard. There's no way around it. You can't hire someone new for that time. It's just impractical in those scenarios, because the training takes too long for someone [to complete], and so other people are left to pick up the slack.

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[6] An H-1B visa allows foreign workers in specialty occupations to work in the United States as long as he or she works for a sponsoring employer.

Liam's notion that many technical workers cannot be replaced during their leaves of absence was also described by Doug, who explained, "right now in my company, if any of us on the team take a week off . . . it does slow us down, and speed is by far the biggest advantage in a startup." In this case, Doug perceived both the need for a rapid pace and the required skills of each team member as critical for success.

In a final example, A.J. provided an analogy to describe the burden of taking a leave of absence from technical work:

> Think of engineering like a sports team. You've got a star football player or a star basketball player and they got out for an injury. Now one minute they're Super Bowl prospects, and the next thing you know, you don't even know if they're going to go to the playoffs.

That the absence of one person could impact the success of the entire team, project, or company was evident throughout the data. Interviewees used these kinds of examples to justify how skills could be outdated so quickly and to explain why leaves of absence were not possible for many men in technical occupations.

During the analysis of the ways in which participants described their technical occupations as unique, two other characteristics of technical emerged as relevant, as particularly impactful on leave-taking practice: requirements for extreme employee time commitments and project timelines. Both of these provisions were labeled as unique and both were used to describe why taking a leave of absence was unlikely in technical work. Each is explained below.

Extreme time requirements. The computer scientists in this study talked about extreme face time requirements or other kinds of extreme dedication. In response to my recruitment email gathering participants for this study of work–life balance, one computer scientist replied

simply, “100% work; 0 home.” Clearly, the potential interviewee did not have time even to give an interview.

As another example, Richard explained,

> I personally worked generally twelve hours a day. [It is] very exceptional [for me] to not work at least 60 hours a week. In fact, one time I put the whole organization on mandatory 12 hours a day, 6 days a week because they weren’t exerting a sufficient effort from my observation. Well, they come back and said, “We just can’t do 6 twelves. Can we leave Saturday at noon?” So I said sure. We in management had to back off to only getting 66 hours a week out of them.
>
> During the [decades of] the sixties and seventies, the company expected you basically to be at work when[ever] the rest of the organization was, and for not doing that, it was basically almost viewed as insubordination and reason for termination. So, in our cases, people really worked hard. We put in a lot time. Personally, when I was on the technical side, we pulled a lot of 24-hour turns. We would have some cots set up in the lab and basically [we would] take 2-hour power naps and we’d work around the clock trying to get the project done.
>
> I’d say things started changing around the mid-80s. There was some major shift going on that people just wouldn’t sign up, [that] they wouldn’t do that anymore. But back in the 60s and 70s there was an understanding that [employees would do] whatever it took to get the job done.

Richard noted that he personally maintained the high work ethic throughout his career, even as employees began to push back against working so many hours.

In another example, Phillip explained that maximum hours are sometimes required. He said, "if a site needs to launch then that definitely could be an 80 hour work week. So it just depends…we all sort of worked off the clock a lot." Similarly, Christopher, who described long shifts and little sleep, also spoke about working around the clock or "off the clock:"

> Once, I had to be gone for over a month. I got 12 hours of sleep every 4 days . . . When I travel, it's different. When I travel, I work until the job gets done. There have been times where I've been on a specific trip and in 4 days, I'll get 12 hours worth of sleep. But those are rare, [and] I do get paid for every hour that I work, up to a cap.

Working beyond the "cap" would qualify as unusual, because such caps are frequently set beyond 16 hour days by management. Quentin also mentioned a 16-hour expectation. He claimed, "if you're working 16 hour days for a few days straight, that's to be expected."

In fact, long hours seem to be expected and acceptable for most of the men in this study. Another computer scientist explained that this time expectation is often met without resistance because technical workers liked or expected to work long hours. He claimed,

> I would say probably about half, or maybe slightly more than half, of IT guys would be considered workaholics, where they're—well, I would say a lot of people put in a lot of hours, like 60 to 70 hours per week . . . Some people definitely just come in and work a lot and that's just their nature, yeah, some people just show up to work at 7:00 a.m. and don't really leave.

Hence, the notion that 16-hour days are expected, normal, or natural indicates that the extreme time requirements, and particularly in computer science, makes employees feel that they must work most of the time.

Interviewee Michael exemplified this ideology, and admitted "in the past five years, I've taken one day off sick. I've got like 500 hours of sick leave saved up." Most participants in this study proclaimed that they were reluctant to use their personal time because they knew they were expected to perform around the clock. This expectation for long hours and extreme commitment is evident in one participant's description of how he worked through the birth of his children; he explained,

> I had two babies in the last two years and so, I'll be honest, I did work in the hospital. I mean, they had Wi-Fi[7] both times, so I was on my laptop, you know, up until like an hour before [the delivery] and then after.

Perhaps the ideology of extreme work commitment is best described by A.J., who claimed that

> work–life balance in engineering and technical applications is a very interesting subject to be talked about, because I really think that in our field there is kind of an expectation, almost, of an *unbalanced* work/life. Especially when you're young, you know they're going to beat the hell out of you.

A.J.'s, and other workers', expectations of long work hours were used to describe how technical work is unique from other occupations and that this factor of technical work mitigates workers' potential to easily take leaves of absence. In particular, the computer scientists in this study described long hours as an occupational and cultural commitment to technology that set their work apart from other fields.

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[7] WiFi refers to the wireless exchange of data, including internet connectivity.

Project-based work. The technical workers in this study also described the way the expectation for extreme hours made taking leaves of absence difficult; however, workers framed this conundrum as a problem of project-based work. For example, Shawn described project-based work as incompatible with leaves of absence, and explained,

> There are a lot of people that won't ever leave their job, or sometimes they won't take days off. And sometimes the corporate policy—I'd say more than even the policy, but the corporate culture and the nature of the work because projects are so performance- and schedule-driven—makes it such that leaves of absence in the midst of the project are very difficult to take.

The project-based nature of his work lead Shawn to believe that it was the particular structure of his work that made taking a leave of absence difficult. Shawn later elaborated that technical jobs that were not based on projects might be more flexible, but also speculated that most technical occupations work on project timelines.

In a similar move, A.J. explained,

> We have to work, work, work, because . . . once a project is done, if there's not any work . . . they'll just lay you off until they want to hire you back [when they get more work]. So, during that work, work, work hard period, if you want to take a leave of absence, it's like, "Oh, see you later, you're out of here!"
>
> There's also the idea among men that [you've] got to work—come hell or high water—because all these projects are time oriented and quality oriented. In this field, to be successful, you've got to put in the time, the hours, the thought, the energy . . . A lot of the technical careers are project-driven, and a lot of times, if you're a key contributor to that project, the other people on that team need you to be present and active consistently

> [in order] for that project to be successful, [which] has direct impact on the bottom-line of the company. And so, jobs that are technical are probably going to be a little less friendly to leave of absences.

As his quote illustrates, A.J. did not perceive support for the notion that employees might take a leave of absence during a project and believed that most engineers would be fired rather than given leave. He also did not problematize his notion that "the idea *among men*" indicated a significant assumption about who performs technical work.

Not all interviewees, however, perceived the organization as driving these decisions. For example, Bruce suggested that project-based work changed his own ideas about whether or not he would want to take a leave. Bruce explained,

> Everything is project based, so the longer I'm gone, the more my projects get backed up. The work doesn't go away. Your projects are still there when you get back, so that, I think balances any desire to leave. Leaving will just create more stress, which then reduces my work–life balance. So taking an actual leave is not helpful.

The tight scheduling and deadline-driven nature of his project-based work created stress for Bruce, who explained that he found balance by avoiding stress and by simply not taking leaves. Because getting behind on deadlines caused Bruce additional stress, leaving work for too long a time would not assist him in achieving balance.

As an interesting counter to some men's claims, many men in this study claimed that taking time off was, in fact, quite possible and even likely in-between projects. For example, interviewee Quentin explained,

> A nice thing about this job is that since you go from project to project, there are a lot of times when you might not have a real heavy commitment. So, if you can get things to

> work out, especially with clients, and say, “Hey, I’m done with my work, here. I don't have anything starting for a while,” they're really supportive of that type of stuff, as long as you're willing to sacrifice being paid for a while, I guess.

As Quentin’s example evidences, taking unpaid time off in-between projects was sometimes framed as a method to achieve some “down time” and sometimes framed as a layoff. Hence, time off between projects was not always the decision of individual workers, but of organizations that ran out of work after a particularly hectic and time-consuming project. Regardless, the interviewees in this study perceived the ability to take time off between projects as a benefit of their work.

As another example, one interviewee explained,

> In between projects, everything kind of changes. If the project is over, if you’re in-between things or if you’re just waiting on work to start, then you know, you might be able to take off [with] no problem[s]. But, if someone is leaving kind of in the middle of their job, then it’s not quite as well received, or if they dump a bunch of stuff on other people. You know, again, it really depends on company culture. and how people work, and how valuable you are to the project. But, it is great that we can take off in-between [projects].

Many men interviewed explained that well-planned leaves of absence occurring between projects might be considered appropriate, although none had actually scheduled particular life events that required leaves of absence directly around project schedules.

In sum, in this section, I’ve described the first finding that answers research question two: “What (if any) discourses do male computer scientists and engineers draw upon to describe their leave-taking practices?” by explaining that technical occupations are revered as unique from

other kinds of occupations because of the rapid pace of technical innovation, a dependence on specialized skills, the requirement for extreme time commitments, and the nature of project-based work. In the next section, I discuss the second finding of research question two, detailing how the men in this study identified their organizations as either supportive or unsupportive, which influenced their leave-taking practices.

Leave Practice Depends Upon Supportiveness of the Work Environment

The second pattern presented in the data is that leave-taking practices were highly dependent upon whether or not the specific manager, organization, or overall work environment was supportive or unsupportive of men taking leave. Whether or not the interviewees took a leave of absence was determined, in large part, by their perception of a supportive work environment. Although only three interviewees had personally taken a leave of absence from work, most of the interviewees felt that they would be supported if they had a good reason and asked their supervisors to take a leave. For example, interviewee Peter, who had never taken a leave explained,

> If somebody needs leave because [he or she] just had a child, we just cover. That's, like I said, it's the law for one thing. But for another thing, it's just civil. It is the decent way to be. And, I don't sense any problems from other coworkers or from any of the managers either.

In this quote, Peter explained that even if resistance occurred, it would not be permissible for legal and ethical reasons. Surprisingly, Peter's quote was the only mention in the entire study of leave as a civic or ethical concern. Peter viewed support as "the decent way to be" and suggested that even though technical occupations in general were not particularly supportive of leaves of absence in general, he and his organization were supportive of leaves of absence.

Another interviewee, Michael, also found his work environment supportive. He explained,

> I would expect that [the company's] policy on leaves of absence would be very generous and sympathetic. I would expect them to say, "If you have to be out for six months because of some bad personal problem, we can't pay you that whole time, but, yeah, go and come back when you can."

Michael never took a leave of absence, but he assumed his workplace would support him if he did.

As another example, Owen, who did not take a leave of absence while undergoing treatment for cancer, explained that his company was completely supportive of other employees who took leave and encouraged him to take a leave. He shared his reasons for staying, despite the support of his company to take a leave, and explained,

> Yeah, I had to go in to the hospital for a couple days for the chemo, and then when I got out I was feeling good enough to come back. Then when they operated to get the sarcoma out of my leg, I was on crutches for about a week. And so, for a couple of days, there was no way I could even hobble into work, so I took a couple days off like that, but it turned out more like sick days than needing FML. But again, we signed up for the paper work in case I did need it, [and] the company was very supportive in helping me get through that. But, sometimes, it's better to be working than thinking about what you've got.

As his example demonstrates, Owen felt completely supported if he wanted to take a leave, but chose to stay at work through most of the duration of his treatment. For Owen, work provided a means to escape from other aspects of his life. The complexities of Owen's experience stem

both from his need to care for himself and also from his need to maintain his identity as a healthy worker. Owen viewed his company as supportive, but also aligned the good of the company with his own desires, which complicated his very real need to attend to his health.

Although most interviewed men felt supported by their companies that they could take a leave if they needed to, they also presented some data that suggested that technical work environments did not always provide support for taking a leave of absence. For example, one interviewee who took paternity leave explained that his company was completely supportive, but also shared that his coworkers and his boss engaged him in "lighthearted joking" about his decision to take time off of work. He elucidated,

> No, my boss is absolutely supportive. Of course, he gave me the ball busting too, but it was never a question, because, I mean, I told him, you know, I knew how when the baby was going to be born, I told him—like, first of all, because I had horror stories—but it was never questioned —never a chance I was going to be denied a request.

In this instance, the employee's leave-taking was supported, but also came with jokes and "ball busting" that signaled that taking a paternity leave was uncommon. This interviewee did not experience any formal or informal punishments for his time away from work, which he classified as a leave, despite the fact that it was paid for with his vacation time and lasted only three weeks. For this interviewee, three weeks amounted to a leave of absence, regardless of his use of vacation time rather than FMLA. This example begs the questions of: *What counts as a leave of absence?* and, *Is any time away from work a leave?* In response, the interviewees talked about leave both as a general time away from work and specifically in terms of FMLA.

Additionally, interviewees also presented some mixed data about whether or not leaves of absence are possible through the use of personal or vacation time, but the caps on the use of

this time gave these employees the perception that they shouldn't use the time in large blocks. For example, Doug explained,

> You get your 10, 14, or 20 vacation days, and you can choose to use them however you want. Some places I've worked at, if you don't use [these vacation days] by the end of the year, you lose [them].

The requirement to relinquish accumulated vacation time at the end of the year meant that employees could not accumulate more time to use in large blocks. This kind of policy is evidence of entrepreneurialist thought. Employees are responsible for deciding how to use their vacation days. This responsibility directly ties to how employees think about taking leaves of absence.

As another example, Jarvis experienced an extreme case of organizational vacation time maintenance, and explained,

> My company doesn't accrue vacation time. I think [that] they are trying to limit or eliminate balance sheet liabilities . . . There were people who had maybe a year's worth of vacation or two years' worth of vacation or something accrued, where it would be sitting on the balance sheet and they would owe that person, and that person would retire and get two extra years of salary. You know what I mean, that the company would have to pay at the time that that person retired.
>
> So, my company just got rid of it. I mean, they just said, 'We're not going to accrue it, [so] work it out with your supervisor.' If you got to take time off and you're not going to, you know, more senior people are not going to get more than less senior people, and if you take more than what your supervisor thinks is enough, then you can be fired, but if you don't then you can just take it. So, there are no accruals at all [anymore].

> There is an implication that you might take two weeks a year, but I'm not sure about more. I guess I could try it and see if they fired me.

In Jarvis' case, vacation time was eliminated so that longer blocks of time were not probable, if possible, for employees. When specific organizations constrain employees from managing their own vacation time, it goes against assumptions about individual responsibility for managing personal work–life practices. Because entrepreneurial assumptions are deeply embedded in technical occupations, this reversal of vacation time autonomy felt shocking and frustrating to Jarvis. When Jarvis said, "I guess I could try it and see if they fired me," he was joking, and quickly followed up with an assurance that he would personally not take such a gamble with his career. Yet his frustration and sense of disempowerment was clear.

In a similar example, another interviewee explained that his company had vacation time and allowed accrual, but that there were negative connotations for actually taking longer blocks of time off. He explained,

> In other places, you can accumulate it over time and take a little bit longer leave. But even then, there's a culture around not necessarily doing that so that you're not gone for six months after saving up for a few years.

In yet another example, Bruce illuminated how messages about leave-taking practice are sometimes muddled. He described,

> from what I've seen, [taking a leave is] a pretty common practice in my field. . . At smaller companies, while I can't say there's negative feeling, there's definitely a lot of pressure for the individual to get back to work as fast as they can. There's a general concern just to make sure everything is going well, whatever the reason for the leave of

> absence, to make sure everything is okay. But, at smaller companies, they definitely pressure you more to get back as soon as you can.

Although their explanations frequently illuminated conflicting details, the majority of the men interviewed felt that their current organization was highly supportive of leaves of absence. However, most of the men also viewed themselves as "lucky" or "fortunate" to have found such supportive environments. In many cases, men explained that they left unsupportive work environments or managers that are more typical of the industry. This trend is perhaps evidence of the view that individuals are responsible for their own career choices. Furthermore, that these men made "the choice" to leave unsupportive environments suggests that individuals working in unsupportive environments could also seek out something different. This move, however, is not possible for all men and complicates the way that men understand the contexts from which they can take or not take leaves of absence.

Additionally, even though most men felt leaves of absence were supported, some men experienced quite the opposite impression of their own work environments. One interviewee explained,

> It totally depends. I'm lucky, but I know it is different in some places. Especially those sweatshop engineering places, though, where there ain't no leave of absence. You go, then forget about it, you're out of here, see you later.

This interviewee described a noticeable difference between "good" engineering outfits and "sweatshop engineering" places, which demanded work around the clock. This employee's example highlighted a tendency for the men in this study to characterize technical occupations as unsupportive of leave-taking, even if their personal circumstances or companies were supportive.

Another interviewee explained that leaves of absence were not supported in technical occupations because they can hurt the business. He explained,

> Going above and beyond [vacation time] is [a leave of absence]. If you need to take a leave of absence—[and] I can see out there situations where perhaps it's needed—but what I think people fail to take into consideration is [that] the company needs to stay solvent and needs to make money. This isn't a communist environment where you can just take off and do whatever you want and still get paid. People need to realize [that] an hour work is an hour paid. If you take off and have a leave of absence, the company needs to fill that position. If you're not there, they're being put at a hardship. So, it's a touchy subject. That's just my feeling [that], if you're gonna' take a leave of absence, try to work it out with the company. If the company says "Yeah, we can work with that" [then] fine. [But] if the company says no, I think it's a mutual negotiation. The person has to decide, "Well, I realize I have to take this leave of absence and I realize I may not be employed after that."

In this instance, the interviewee explained that the business objectives of the organization might not have been realized when employees took leaves of absence. As an employee responsible for his own career, this interviewee stated that he would negotiate with his company, but that his "choices" and actions were up to himself. This interviewee explicitly described himself as entrepreneurialist in thought, and suggested that successful men in technical occupations were able to manage their own careers appropriately.

In a final example, Mark explained how leaves of absences were not supported in his experience across a few organizations, and described,

> You'd worry about what your peers [would say]. There was certainly a stigma in the rumor mill around that. I couldn't imagine any of these old, 20-year, 25-year corporate guys taking a leave of absence. I just don't believe that it would happen. It's really a big stigma attached with these absences and the rumor mill just starts churning, so it's difficult when they come back to, you know, be accepted.

In this case, the unsupportive work environment convinced this employee that it would not be a good idea to take a leave of absence for any reason.

Similarly, Jarvis also felt that leaves of absence were not supported across a number of large organizations. He explained,

> I would imagine it has to do with kids. I don't know. I'll tell you one anecdote that I have—and again, this is from engineers that I know—these are the two impossible things to put together, I think: kids and engineering. I honestly don't believe that you can be an engineer and have balance in the industry, actually. You can find it for yourself by going to a smaller company, but [then] you're not going to work at Google or Apple or Microsoft or Intel. You're not going to work at those companies and have work/life balance, that's it. I mean you're *not* going to work at those companies. I don't believe that that's possible honestly.

Jarvis personally found work–life balance by switching to a smaller company, but emphatically described his view that work and family, or work and balance, were impossible to achieve in big technical organizations. He explained later that the possibility to change the world and the responsibilities that accompanied that "privilege" required a sacrifice of life outside of work. He explained that many men are willing to make that sacrifice for a time, but that many eventually move to smaller firms to find work-life balance. Jarvis' example is further evidence that work–

life balance is complicated, in that it is dependent upon individual "choice" and also upon individuals' reasons for taking leave. For instance, leave-taking to avoid burnout was supported in earlier examples, but leave-taking for families was not, as is explicitly explained here. Moreover, Jarvis' explanation suggests that large, prestigious organizations will not accommodate "life." As such, while individuals who want more free time away from work or who need leaves of absence can stay in technical occupations, they must move to different kinds of organizations and then must seek out the most supportive organizations amongst these. A final implication drawn from this example is the way that Jarvis experienced competing identities as a technical worker and as a parent. He felt that people could not hold both an identity as a technical worker and as a parent at the same time in large organizations.

In this subsection, I described how the interviewees drew upon the notion that work environments were either supportive or unsupportive to explain their leave-taking practices. Discerning what a supportive environment looks like is, thus, a difficult task, and is dependent upon factors including: the size and structure of an organization, the organizational culture, managerial relationships, reasons for leave-taking, individual choice and negotiation skills of workers, and other factors which interact in complicated ways to generate a fuzzy sketch of supportive or unsupportive work environments.

Work and Career are Individual Responsibilities, so Leave Depends on Individual Goals

The third theme that emerged from the data to answer the second research question about leave-taking practice explanations was that individual employees were responsible for their own career success, and that in order to be successful, the interviewees felt they made individual choices to forgo leave in order to strengthen their careers. The notion that employees are responsible for their own career success and that managing work–life issues such as whether or

not to take a leave of absence was extensively present through the data. The men interviewed in this study explained that independence was a critical factor for job success in their occupations. This independence was particularly evident around questions about what made computer scientists and engineers good (or bad) at their jobs.

For example, Liam explained, "Producing high quality is really important, but quality isn't something they teach you in school at all. Rather, it sort of had to do with independent studies. You have to teach yourself." For Liam and many other interviewees, the quality of work is critical, and employees were responsible for learning how to produce "high quality" work independently.

Another interviewee claimed, "I taught myself most of my skills. You can't learn it all from a book, in most cases, we know more than the books anyway." For this interviewee, even advanced classes were not sophisticated enough to teach him what he wanted to know, so he taught himself through trial and error. As this example demonstrates, although the men interviewed here spoke frequently about their experiences in college and advanced degrees, they also claimed that they engaged in significant self-teaching.

Moreover, not only did the men in this study suggest that skills were largely a self-taught endeavor, but they also asserted that their career success was their own responsibility. For example, Jeff explained what makes people unsuccessful in his line of work, describing,

> What makes people unsuccessful are the people that sit back and wait for direction from their manager. They'll sit at their cubicle and they won't do, they won't be proactive to look for things that they could be working on new ideas for a company. An unsuccessful person at a company is a person that just sits at their cubicle, an eight-to-

> five person, and does nothing unless their manager mandates them. That's an unsuccessful person.
>
> A person that goes above and beyond is looking for ideas, looking for new applications, [and] is putting in the extra effort to think outside the box, and think for the company as if it was coming out of their wallet instead of the company's wallet. That's the person that's successful in business. . . . I'm a very entrepreneurial person [and] I'm very pro individualistic, you know. It's like you're responsible for your own destiny [and that] your future is in your hands.

Jeff believed that workers in most fields, and workers in technical occupations in particular, needed some entrepreneurial gumption to succeed. He applauded individual effort and claimed that individuals who must "wait for direction" would not be successful in technical occupations. This is evidence of a heavy reliance upon individual responsibility for career success. Hence, according to Jeff, to be successful is to be independent and able to manage oneself with little supervision.

This theme of individual responsibility for career success was directly linked to leave-taking practice by a number of interviewees. For example, one interviewee explained,

> It wouldn't be great for my career if I left. You try to be indispensible, especially now when lots of people are getting laid off, so it's kind of like not a good idea to take a leave. I knew a guy who took two weeks off when his wife had a baby. He was laid off like two weeks later or something like that. So you have to think about your own career and really think about what is important: having a job or not?

The fear of losing his job was acute for this interviewee. He mentioned that leave is never a good idea in his occupation, but particularly so in the current economic situation.

Similarly, another interviewee explained that taking leaves of absence just isn't a smart career move:

> It kind of makes some sense that women are paid less, you know? Because many times—not all the time, obviously—they don't work as much. I mean, if you only work three-fourths of a year, because you are spending time with your family or whatever, you are going to make less and you are going to probably have less or outdated skills. I'm not faulting [women] by any means. But for men, it is more of a choice. [Men] can say, "Hey, I care about my career and advancing" and then they wouldn't want to take a leave. Or they might say "I don't care about my career, so I'm going to take a month off to bond with my kid." Either way, it is a matter of personal decision.

For this interviewee, an individual's decision of whether or not to take a leave of absence was directly correlated with his or her career success, and was completely an individual responsibility. The assumption that taking a leave of absence means "not working as much" points to some of the difficulty in gaining support to take a leave of absence. Further, the assumption that women frequently work less than men evokes gendered assumptions about carework and home responsibilities. That these are responsibilities are positioned as individual choices directly linked to career success also provides evidence of how taking a leave of absence can be difficult and can generate biases.

Other men pointed to their individual responsibility to manage when and how leaves occurred. For example, Mark explained,

> It was a conscious effort on my part and my wife's [part] to, you know, not necessarily go after the highest paying job or anything like that but to have a steady job with a good company and forgo in the luxuries to balance [our] life.

In a similar example, Liam explained,

> [Whether or not you take leave is] really up to you. You get to manage how you get paid during that time. So, you sort of have to negotiate with the [manager], [and] if they deem you as essential, really, they only have to give you 12 weeks because of federal law, but if you are essential and you can negotiate well, you can get more. But it's really your negotiation that matters.

These interviewees asserted that negotiating how long leave would last and whether or not it was paid was the responsibility of the individual employee.

As another example, Oliver speculated,

> I think you can still take leave as long as you kind of independently continue to educate yourself. I think that's what I've seen people do is, even if they take leave. They still go and read and are interested in what they're doing and there's many ways now to keep up just by reading stuff on the internet or playing around.

In this example, Oliver believed that leaves of absence were not detrimental to career success, but that the time away from work could be managed in a particular way to have less of a career impact.

In this subsection, I highlighted the ways that the collected data emphasized individual responsibility for career success and interviewees' perceptions of the impact of leaves of absence on their career success. In the next subsection, I explain the fourth theme, gender expectations, which emerged through the data and that explicates how male computer scientists and engineers explain their leave-taking practices.

Gendered Expectations Preclude Men from Taking Leaves of Absence

The men in this study drew upon gendered Discourses to explain their leave-taking practices. Specifically, interviewees claimed that men do not take leave, that the breadwinner role was theoretically and/or metaphorically important, and that their breadwinner role was a financial necessity in their decisions to forgo leaves. The claim that women could take leave but *men* don't or shouldn't take leave was evident in a majority of the interviews. While the gendered nature of the comments was evident, the interviewees expressed some difficulty in explaining why they thought men did not or should not take leaves of absence. For example, Jesse explained,

> It's kind of like, I don't know, a man thing . . . I don't know how to explain it. It's a male thing. It's kind of like . . . I was brought up to take care of what you need to take care of, no matter what.

Jesse's hesitation suggested that he was uncomfortable discussing what might have been perceived as traditional gender roles. Jesse elaborated that he did not want to be perceived as "old fashioned," even though he felt compelled to avoid a practice that he characterized as typically feminine.

In a similar vein, Michael explained gendered assumptions about leave-taking that were evident in his experiences. He described,

> I think frequently women are more likely to feel that it's their responsibility and/or something that they want to do to take care of people who need taking care of, and that's either their very young babies, or sick relatives, or elderly parents. It tends to be women, I think, more than men, who do that. Men don't seem to feel that as much, but it is not necessarily a clear-cut division.

In this case, Michael referenced the stereotypical gender division of carework and pointed out that many women feel a responsibility for engaging in carework that men might not feel. Michael supposed that the assumption of care work was responsible for inequalities that exist in leave-taking practice.

A.J. also discussed gendered assumptions about leave-taking. He explained,

> I think sometimes it's almost easier if a girl needs to take a leave of absence for something, [that] it's a little more accepted than for a guy to do that. Guys just kind of have it known amongst themselves . . . I think that you see a lot of women who are [as] dedicated [as men] and have that same mentality [as men,] but I just think that the nature of having a child, I think of just a couple other examples. There are some women I know that they have, like, an ailing grandparent or parent and they're caring for them [but] you don't see too many guys taking care of their ailing parents. I mean some guys do, but you just don't see it as much among men as you do among females. And, if a guy's doing, that usually he's married, usually there's a woman in his life. But just a single guy? No, not as much.

A.J.'s interesting use of the term "girl" to describe women who take leave juxtaposed with his later use of the term of "women" who are dedicated to work suggested that there is some discrepancy between the two. A.J. was quite aware of gendered expectations of carework, and extended these to expectations about partner status. His thought that single "guys" don't engage in carework harks the image of the ideal worker: a single man without responsibilities outside of work.

While many interviewed men were cognizant of gendered expectations, some were entrenched in such roles more explicitly. For example, Jeff claimed,

> I have never seen anyone pull the FMLA card . . . I agree [that] women should get time when they have children. I think that's part of the deal. It should be, but I don't agree with men getting time off, the same amount of time off. And I haven't seen it [being taken by employees]. And I don't approve of it. I haven't heard of it either, [men] getting the same amount of time off, other than maybe [in] Europe.

Throughout the interview, Jeff emphatically disagreed with paternity leave beyond saved vacation time, and noted the gendered assumptions that shaped his opinion. He called himself "traditional" and worried that his traditional perspective wouldn't be recognized in the study about gender.

However, other interviewees also defended traditional approaches to gender. For example, one interviewee described how he would just not leave work, because men do not leave work. He explained,

> I don't know, it's less socially acceptable for a guy. Because I know me, come hell or high water, I'm going to work, no exceptions. I don't care if I'm feeling bad or anything. Even if I don't like my job, I'm going to look for a job, [and] I'm not going to take a leave of absence, I'm just going to continue to work come hell or high water.

This interviewee also noted that he believed women and other (less traditional) men could take leave if they wanted to go against the typical gender expectations, but that he personally would not.

Another interviewee, who took three weeks of vacation time for the birth of his child, described some of the teasing he received from his coworkers and boss for his gendered digression. He explained,

> It was all in good fun . . . It was like, "You're not gonna' want to be home that long with your wife and your kid, you're gonna' want to come back" and, "Um, are you having the kid or is she having the kid?" And it was in good fun and I laughed at it and they certainly did not mean that in a mean way. It was good, it was appropriate.

Although this interviewee's coworker' and boss teasing was "all in good fun," it nonetheless reveals a reprimand for violating gendered assumptions about men taking leaves of absence, and parental leave in particular.

Many interviewees also referenced their alignment with, or pressure to, conform to the traditional breadwinner role. Jeff explained,

> I think a lot of men inherently feel like a provider. It may be a very stereotypical and old, old thinking that the guy provides for the family or, if not, maybe it still has the embedded thought that, you know, "Hey, I'm the one that needs to be providing." Maybe that's why [men] feel more inspired to be there and work.

Richard felt a similar responsibility to be a breadwinner and to perform traditional gender roles. He explained,

> Well, I think most of us view [that] we're the chief breadwinner and it goes back this out of sight, out of mind thing that hangs in the back of our mind. I love what I do, I just don't want to take the time off and come back and not have what it is that I love doing. Something might change, you know, the program might get cancelled, or new people coming in. I'm not here to work on the exciting challenges and technical problems.
>
> While I was working, then, my wife had basically become the chief child rearer. We had four kids: two girls [and] two boys, and her job was to raise the kids . . . and the

> four kids grew up great. I mean, they all got masters degrees and everything else, all very successful. So, she did a great job and I can't take any credit for that. And working the hours I did, I just was not as much involved with family time as I, you know, in retrospect, probably should have been, but the results turned out great. And, I was busy providing them financial support.

Richard claimed that he might have liked to spend more time with his children, but that he felt pride that he put them all through college and carried the mortgages on some of his children's and grandchildren's homes.

Another interviewee, Peter, expressed that societal expectations and the way people are raised creates gendered norms in the workplace. He explained,

> Mothers and children are probably expected to be more together than a man would, although I certainly know plenty of men who have taken paternity leave. But [these men] typically come back sooner, and they come back full time. A woman might come back after a longer maternity leave, and maybe come back at some part-time status, to spend more time with her children. I think this is because that's just how women are brought up, and that is how our society still sees things, that the woman is the caregiver primarily.

Other men harkened back to traditional times to describe the presence of breadwinner mentality. One interviewee explained, "I'm 55 years old, and when I was a kid, women didn't even work. My mother didn't work. And most of the mothers in my neighborhood did not work". In another example, Christopher explicated,

> Evolution and natural selection you know: it's the women who tend to have the babies, [and], you know, possibly hundreds or thousands of years ago, were the most loving, the ones who liked it the most, and men provided for them.

In a contradictory move however, Christopher also claimed, “If my wife made my money, I would very seriously consider being a household dad, because I enjoy spending that much time with my daughter.” Christopher shared that his desire to spend time with his daughter was different than how he perceived his peers’ interest in parenting. For Christopher, traditional roles were important in the “natural” order of gender, but he would be willing to break from his natural breadwinner role given the opportunity.

Describing gendered roles as natural was an unchallenged assumption about breadwinner roles. Desmond, for example, shared his thoughts about why men don’t take leave, and explained,

> The perception of the individual themselves is that if [a man] comes along and asks for leave because his wife is having a baby, people expect that leave to be short. Where it’s perfectly acceptable for a female to say, “Well, I wanna’ take two months off, three months off, four months off.” I think we tend to think that kind of natural [and] take for granted that for women, it is more natural to take a longer leave. And that’s perfectly, perfectly acceptable. I think it boils down to attitude. [When] men come in and say, “I want to take three months off because I’m having a baby,” we may say, “Well, why do you need so much time off?” So, it’s just like a natural perception, if you will.

The “natural” division between women as nurturers and men as breadwinners was regularly called upon to describe why the men in this study by and large did not take leaves of absence.

The men in this study also cited material reasons for foregoing leaves of absence. Many men explained that their families depended on them financially, and that they could not afford to take unpaid time off of work. For example, Liam, who was planning a partial paternity leave, explained,

> When you talk about people not getting paid, it can be very difficult. I know with our family, we are looking to breastfeed, and really, there is only one of us who can do that. So, it's not really a question of who's gonna' stay home first. If I didn't have such a generous employer, I wouldn't be able to take that time off. I actually intend to take my leave off when her leave ends, so that we have one of us working at any time. If that makes sense; it does for us, financially.

The financial implications for Liam and his family played a large role in determining when, how, and if Liam would have taken a leave of absence.

In a similar way, Quentin described how his financial situation dictated his leave-taking practice. He explained,

> [It was] just because of our own personal financial situation. I couldn't really afford to go unpaid at that time, especially because my wife was quitting her work. So, nope, [taking leave] never really crossed my mind… if I could have afforded to go without a paycheck for that time, I definitely would have.

Quentin expressed a desire to take a leave of absence, but mentioned it "never really crossed" his mind because the financial ramifications were too great.

In a final example, Greg shared his thoughts on the material consequences of men taking leaves of absence, and described,

> When the men are doing it, they're gonna' be doing it and gonna' be losing salary. With women, at least where I work, they've always been given six weeks of paid maternity leave . . . I think if anyone took it beyond that, then they would be doing it without pay. So, I would think that's the incentive not to go any further than beyond the two weeks.

Greg's perception was that at his company, women were paid for maternity leave whereas men were only entitled to their vacation time.

In this subsection, I outlined the ways that interviewees talked about how gendered expectations complicated leave-taking for men. By specifically explaining that leave is not a masculine practice, and that their roles as breadwinners were both metaphorically and materially important, the men in this study presented a complicated picture of the ways in which gender complicates leave-taking practice.

Leaves of Absence are Mitigated by Virtual Work, Vacation Time, or Quitting

The final way that men explained their leave-taking practices was to explain that leaves of absence were not necessary because men in technical occupations could work virtually or could quit to get time off. When I set out to answer research question two about how men explained their leave-taking practices, I did not anticipate that they would overwhelmingly *not* see a need at all for leaves of absence. However, the data strongly suggested that leaves of absence were not viewed as necessary *at all* for the vast majority of the interviewees. The men in this study used two primary ways to explain how leaves of absence were unnecessary: (1) by asserting that virtual work enabled them to work from home if necessary, and (2), by quitting their jobs at crucial life moments to gain time. These moves were clearly depicted as practices that were *not* leaves of absence, and each will be explained below.

Virtual work. Throughout the study, many men talked about working virtually as the premiere work–life method. This was particularly true when men explained that leaves of absence were not necessary for them. For example, A.J., who took some time away from his office for a broken leg, explained how working virtually enabled him to avoid a leave of absence. He described,

> At first, I just couldn't even work, but I still got paid. I don't even think they deducted my vacation. But then the rest of my time that I was in the cast, I worked from home, and they allowed me to do that.

Although A.J. could not work because he was heavily sedated in the first few days, he was relieved that his company allowed him to work virtually for the duration of his time in the hospital and while he recovered at home.

Owen also described how working virtually enabled him to avoid a leave of absence while he was undergoing treatment. He asserted,

> When I was in the hospital having chemo, I was still feeling okay so I could still do work with my laptop. When you do a leave of absence, be it for health or even the guys or the ladies that take FML for paternity, they could still do work at home because they're mobile. They're able to [in] technical occupations [because] there's a lot of times you can do the work, and, given the ability from the company to take your laptops home, [this] can really help out a lot to be able to do your work.

Work was a welcome relief from treatment for Owen, who was grateful for the opportunity to keep working through his treatment because it made him feel like himself and took his mind off of his health problems. The ability to work virtually eliminated the need for him to take a full leave of absence. Owen was approved to take an extended leave through FMLA, but found he preferred to work. Thus, he took a few days off and then worked some from home. He explained that virtual work enabled him to balance time to take care of himself with work.

Nick also described how his full-time work-from-home schedule alleviated work–life conflict. He explained,

> I think I have a pretty good work–life balance. I can fix my hours pretty easily. I can go up and have lunch with my family [and I am] able to go work out at lunch if I wanted to. I mean, I have a twenty second, if that, commute from bedroom to basement to office. It's not like I need to go get in the car and drive 45 minutes each way, which cuts into either my family time or work time, you know, as far as the work–life balance. So, I feel like I have it pretty good working out of the house because I can get up earlier, or stay later, and flex my time during the day so that I can have some balance. From that perspective, I don't have an issue with it [and] I don't feel overworked [and] I don't feel underworked
>
> Just to give you an example, today I got up and started work at 6 a.m. so that I could run up at 7:30-ish to help my wife get the kids dressed and fed. Then at 8:30 a.m. she took off with two of the kids, leaving one kid here in the swing, the four month old, so she could go get groceries. So, you know, I'm trying to work and manage watching the baby, and our days are blending together. I guess there's a saying [that] the days are long, but the years fly by, which so far has been the case. So, yeah, right now it's managing and it's supporting the family and at lunch or if I try to get out in the morning to work out, I do.

Blending parenting and work facilitated work–life balance for Nick, and alleviated his need for leaves of absence.

Jesse also noted that the ability to work virtually saved him the hassle of taking a leave of absence when his child was born. He said,

> I basically juggled working over the phone and on the computer with customers with [my child] being here. He just barely started going to preschool three days a week. But my

> boss knows all about this . . . and so, I didn't really need to [take leave] because I was at home already.

Jesse moved to a virtual office when his first child was born, and continued to work in that capacity so he could parent full time while his wife worked.

> As a final example, Greg also worked virtually when he had his first child. He explained, The details that needed to be dealt with I just, I dealt with from home. I'd log in for an hour here or there and help out. So, in terms of planning for it, you know, it really wasn't too big of a deal.

Greg found that leaving work was fairly easy because he could continue to handle details and other work expectations virtually. The merits of virtual work were mentioned in a variety of contexts in this study, but particularly in explaining why the men interviewed here did not take formal or official leaves of absence.

Vacation time . Leaves of absence for the men in this study were almost unanimously taken through saved vacation time. One interviewee, working in academia, described how he structured his ability to take six months off from work for the upcoming birth of his child. He explained,

> We get FMLA, [so] you have to take, or you can take, up to six months of accrued sick or vacation leave during the first year that your child is born. It's very generous enough, especially when compared with industry or anything else. It has to be accrued leave—it's not a gift. They sort of encourage you to manage your sick and vacation leave in with your family planning. So, if you've been here 12 years [and] you have 6 months accrued, then you can have one kid and take six months, or you can have three kids and take two

> months, or you can have six kids and take one month. It's really up to you, you get to manage how you get paid during that time.

Even in this extreme case (the only leave in this study to last longer than three weeks), the employee still drew almost exclusively upon vacation time.

Another interviewee, Christopher, took three weeks off of work. He explained,

> We actually have a very generous leave plan. I think I have like four weeks of vacation [and] I can carry it over from year to year, up to [a total of] six weeks. So, I have a very generous leave with pay, vacation, and I also accrue four hours of vacation or of sick leave per pay period, which carries over. I can [also] carry over unlimited amount of sick leave. So I took a month off at the birth of my daughter. I used, sick time, but I actually came back after three weeks.

Although he was able to take what he called a leave of absence, Christopher's time off was his earned vacation time. Adam cited a similar strategy to take time off, and explained, "I had vacation time saved up and I just went to my boss and asked if I could take a month off or six weeks off and they said it was okay." Using vacation time, even in block amounts, was an acceptable alternative to leave for some of the men in this study.

As another example, Quentin claimed, "I haven't taken a leave of absence. The most I did was two weeks when my son was born, but that was more just time off. It wasn't extended leave. I used my vacation time." As a final example, Jeff explained,

> When I had each one of my sons, I took one week of vacation time each time. And that wasn't paid time off, I mean it wasn't above and beyond my vacation time, or those three weeks that I have.

These employees' substitution of vacation time for leaves of absence was nearly an invisible marker and one that complicated this study. When asked if they had ever taken a leave of absence, a few men answered "yes" and then later explained that they used sick or vacation time to address nonwork issues. Other men asked me what I meant by leave, to which I responded, "Whatever you personally consider to be a leave of absence."

Moreover, in my attempt to keep the analysis open, much ambiguity about what a leave of absence means for technical men arose. The responses in this study sufficiently complicated the notion that a leave of absence was easily identifiable. For the men in this study, however, when talking about their own personal experiences with leave, it was always (with only one exception) discussed as vacation time. When questioned about the correlation between leave and vacation time, some men explicated that formal organizational policy dictated that they take vacation or sick time first, before they could take unpaid "leave," while others did not challenge the trend to use vacation time completely in lieu of a formal leave of absence.

Another prevalent and interesting way that men avoided taking official leaves of absence was to quit their jobs. In perhaps the most interesting finding of this study, a number of men cited a trend to quit in order to generate a lengthy time away from work. For example, A.J. explained that many men "just went and found another job to get peace of mind. It's kind of like therapy: take a couple months in between." In a similar vein, Oliver explained,

> I've had a little bit of a pattern where every time we had a child, I just quit my job and didn't take a leave. It just happened to always be at a time where I was sort of done with that job and I would, you know, take that as a reason [to quit]., So when our first was born, I worked from home and as a consultant, independently, for about a year and a half.

> And when the second was born, well, [I had] about the same, not quite as long, but probably ten months where I took off and was at home and worked out of the basement.

Oliver's "coincidental" scheduling of hiatuses around the births of his children enabled him to achieve long stretches of time away from work. However, quitting a job seems precariously risky, particularly in an unfriendly labor market.

Despite the risks, another interviewee reflected,

> In IT, I've seen a decent amount of men leaving when they have kids, kind of using it as a stepping stone to leave the company and then do something else, like a take a break and then do something else. I know at least three or four people that have done that.

Thus, quitting to secure time off was presented as an ordinary practice that was quite well known in this occupation.

As another example, when I asked if he would ever take a leave of absence, Adam said,

> I think the policy is that they would terminate you. There's no sabbatical, but I know that for a fact because I actually talked to people and they want to go on like a one-year leave, and the only way is to get fired or to resign and come back later, to get rehired. I think we're pretty good about hiring people back though.

Adam went on to explain that it was common practice to rehire workers who quit or were laid off, particularly as laying workers off between projects when the workflow slowed was a regular experience.

Shawn also explained that quitting was a common practice. He claimed,

> I know a guy who quit his job so that he could spend more time with his child. He got a new job, but that's standard. It's like if you want to be spending time with your kid, you leave your job, find something else that's more accommodating.

That quitting is a more viable option than taking a leave of absence speaks to the cultural bias against formal leaves of absence. It also suggests that work and nonwork pursuits are not compatible, and, instead, one must completely separate the two realms rather than combine them with the use of periodic stretches away from work.

In this section, I answered research question two by describing the ways in which the men interviewed for this study explained their leave-taking practices. The data suggested that five main Discourses framed the men's understanding of leave-taking practice: (1) that technical occupations are unique and thus have unique requirements for leaves of absence; (2) that the supportiveness of work environments determine leave-taking practice; (3) that individuals are responsible for their own skill retention and career success and, thus, that leaves of absence are considered in light of how they impact the employee's career; (4) that gendered expectations, roles, and material consequences determine whether or not men take leave; and (5), that virtual work or quitting eliminate the need for formal or official leaves of absence. These Discourses both entwined and conflicted, alternating in importance, to create a complex picture of what technical occupations "are like" and how leave-taking practice follows the expectations put forth by the knotty intermingling of these myriad Discourses.

Research Question Three: What Discursive Resources do High-Tech Male Workers Use to Make Sense of "Balance" or to Resist its Imposition?

The third research question asked about the discursive resources employees used to make sense of "balance" or to resist its imposition. The data revealed five discursive resources used by workers when making sense of "balance," which both accepted and resisted its imposition, including: (1) burnout avoidance, (2) family, (3) work–life as irrelevant for true technicians, (4) flextime, and (5) outlier mentality. I will elaborate on each of these discursive resources here.

When asked about what balance meant to the interviewees, many participants described balance in ways that are different from popular conceptions of "balance." Although a majority of the interviewees passionately expressed that their families were important (typically either the most important or one of the most important) aspects of their lives, "work–life balance" was not expressed solely as work–family balance. In fact, the interviewees mentioned activities such as going to the gym or participating in other recreational activities more often than, and actually before, they mentioned balance in terms of their families. Interestingly, many interviewees either concluded with or began with a discussion of "burnout" and claimed that they knew they found balance when they were able to avoid burnout, regardless of how they personally chose to avoid it. In this context, balance was framed as a necessary focus for technical workers.

Balance Framed as Burnout Avoidance

The interviewees described the discursive resource of burnout as occurring when individuals are emotionally and physically drained from working too hard. Interviewees attributed workers succumbing to problems (e.g., drug and alcohol addictions, divorces, and health problems) to burnout and strongly suggested that work–life balance was primarily about avoiding burnout. Interestingly, the men who talked about burnout overwhelmingly supported leaves of absence for men to support burnout avoidance, even when they did not support leaves of absence for births, or deaths. This suggests that the reason for taking a leave of absence is critically important in the way in which the leave is perceived. Burnout is taken as a combination of factors that might push men to quit their jobs, such as divorce, alcoholism, or other "breakdown" point.

For example, A.J. explained,

> I have even seen people take a leave of absence because they are so stressed out from their job mentally and emotionally because they have been under a lot of pressure. They're about to burn out and they need that time off.

In a similar example, Christopher shared a story about a coworker with burnout, and explained,

> We had a guy that kind of got burned out, so he used up all his sick leave and all his vacation time and was gone for like three months and then came back. We all supported that. You gotta do what you gotta do.

No individuals in this study expressed taking a leave of absence solely for burnout, but they tended to frame this practice as excelling in balance. In this way, balance is not equal to work–life, or work–family, but rather, as doing what it takes to stave off burnout.

As another example, Greg explained,

> When people work 60 hours a week, they start to burn out [and] they become less productive, yada, yada, yada. My first year out of college, I was working like 65 hours a week for months and months at a time. When it came time, after my one year anniversary, to give out raises, I got the same raise as one of my coworkers who, at the time, wasn't being very productive because he couldn't get a security clearance and was basically doing busy work. And, you know, we got the same raise and like, okay, that's when I realized that, you know, I was just a number and pretty much from that point forward I've only worked overtime when I wanted to or because I caused the problem, you know, caused us to be late or whatever on the schedule.

Greg further explained that this early lesson in a near burnout experience led him to revise his work–life balance practices. He now works mostly 40-hour weeks and takes periodic days off.

Terrence also mentioned burnout avoidance as the key to work–life balance. He explained,

> Balance means being able to spend enough time with my wife that she knows I know her. You know, it's that I know I'm in a relationship. Being able to be there for her, being able to take enough time for myself as well, to make sure that I don't get too stressed out, or—what's the word? I don't remember what the term is—but, don't get too overwhelmed basically by work. Oh, right. Burnout.

In a final poignant example, one interviewee explained that burnout avoidance is the point of work–life balance programs. He explained,

> The entire point of having [work–life] policies and programs and whatnot is so we don't get burnout. I mean, if we are burned out, we can't work. If you let yourself burn out, you just aren't going to be productive, and then your work life is messed up, and everything else you have going on is messed up. Yeah, so balance is that: making sure that doesn't happen, making sure you work out, [and] take care of yourself, see your kids, travel, go to church, or whatever, play video games, sleep, whatever it takes to keep yourself in check.

For this interviewee, balance meant doing "whatever it takes" to avoid burnout.

Managing burnout as evidence of a balanced life presents some contradictions in the context of leave-taking practice. It almost serves as a way to bypass biases about leaves of absence while still making space for nonwork pursuits because it stands as an acceptable reason to take time away from work. However, supporting leaves of absence to avoid burnout disregards the notion that leaves of absence could be acceptable for other reasons. Additionally, approving leaves to avoid burnout expressly benefits organizations more so than the individuals

granted the leave and who can claim burnout is ambiguous. Thus, casting burnout avoidance as proof of balance without contestation is problematic. While burnout was perhaps the most unexpected discursive resource used to describe balance, the interviewees also drew upon the discursive resource of ample family time to make sense of balance, which is explained in the next subsection of this chapter.

Family

When asked to describe what "balance" meant to them personally, interviewees talked about some parts of their lives outside of work that were important enough to them to warrant consideration for "balance." For example, many men talked about spending time with their families as the primary nonwork pursuit involved in balance.

For instance, Christopher explained,

> It is my wife and my daughter. When I'm not working, they essentially consume my life. Like, I really don't have too many hobbies, and of course, my family just started, so I'm sure that's gonna' change soon. But, when I'm not at work, I'm on my way home with them, and when I'm on travel, when I'm going back to the hotel for the night, my first thought is of them and I can't wait to Skype, take a video, and make sure they can see me.

Christopher's emphasis on his family eclipsed other ways that he might have described balance. For him, family was all encompassing.

In a similar example, Jarvis explained,

> I got to make it to my kids' baseball games. I got to, you know, help them with their homework, and take vacations with them and, I think [that] it really all revolves around doing things with my family.

In yet another example, Jesse explained how the importance of balancing family led him to work virtually, so that he could simultaneously take care of his son while his wife worked. He shared,

> Family means everything, it means everything to me. I've just been the type of person where, you know, I know work is work, [and that] you've gotta do it, but if it kind of interfered to [the point] where I couldn't be myself, or be around my family, or whatever, I'd just do something else. I would just do something else. It's just too important to me . . . And so, me, I'm home, I get to see him ride his bike and play t-ball and do everything else and stuff. It's real important to me.

As these examples illustrate, many of the interviewees, and particularly new dads, discussed the importance of spending time with their families, broadly defined as children, parents, wives and girlfriends.

One interesting way that family balance and leave intersected was in reference to foreign workers who were allowed to take two or three months off between projects to go home to see their families. Oliver explained,

> We have a lot of foreigners working for us. So we've allowed them to, for example, go back home and spend a month or two in China or Russia or where they're coming from and work bimonthly and take some vacation in between. I've actually done the same myself. I grew up in Germany and I go there sometimes and just work bimonthly.

Oliver described this as a routine practice, and a completely supported form of leave. He mentioned that these foreign workers were typically under strict government rules and often

cannot work. For example, workers from Iran are under strict policies because of international trade rules. Oliver speculated that it was perhaps one of the only true leaves of absence available, where workers did not work at all while they were away.

Similarly, Desmond explained,

> Contractors who come from India and China and come work on a project in the United States [often ask] for a month leave or six weeks leave and they would visit their family, get married, or have a baby. So, the having the baby leave would be a couple weeks, but they [would] take that opportunity to have a much longer break to go home and visit their family. So, there's quite a bit of that [occurring], but that is very specific to people who come in from overseas.

Desmond also claimed that this kind of leave was perfectly acceptable and supported in his organizational experience. That people would want to see their families at least once or twice a year was supported as an important reason to take a leave of absence and as critical for achieving balance.

Although family was cited as very important for the interviewees, some interviewees resisted the imposition of a family assumption in work–life policies. One interviewee said,

> Those policies really are more for people who have kids, and it isn't really fair. Me and my friends work way more. Many, many more hours than some of them. But it's not like I can tell my manager that I also need to leave early because I need to work out or want to play with my new [video game] system. It's kind of a weird and annoying thing.

This interviewee elaborated that his pursuits were equally important to him personally, but that he felt that his nonwork pursuits were not validated in the same ways that other employees' nonwork pursuits were.

Quentin also spoke about the perception that nonwork is frequently conflated with family. He said,

> I've seen things on projects before where its 7:00 at night and everyone is still working. The project's going on and someone says, “I really have to go and put my kids to bed, so I’m going to have to pick this up later.” People don't seem to have a big deal about that, but I've also seen the same thing where a single guy says, “Hey, I've got to go let my dogs out, they've been in the house all day without anyone,” and people scoff at that. So I can definitely see how there is a little bit of discrimination there between life outside. Most people do interpret that to just be family outside. But that's definitely not 100% of the case.

In this section, I described the ways that the interviewees used the discursive resource of family to make sense of balance. However, as some examples illustrate, many men resist this discursive resource. The next subsection explains another discursive resource that was used to resist the imposition of work–life balance: the concept that a work–life distinction was not relevant for “true” or “real” technical workers.

The Work–Life Distinction is Irrelevant for True Technicians

Many interviewees claimed that any distinction between work and life was irrelevant. These men claimed that, for people with a true passion for technical work, work is life and life is work; thus, any distinction between the two is not useful. Many of the interviewees strongly resisted work–life as separate spheres and claimed that they personally experienced work as life and their lives as their work.

For example, Michael explained,

> the great majority of people I've known in this business [believe that] work is life. Doing hardware [and] software development is a very, very large part of their li[ves]. I don't know that they're thinking of balance in many other respects. I hesitate to say its even work. I mean that's obviously what they're doing for a living and making money, but they are just so interested in this stuff that that's pretty much most of their life. [Work], to them, is balance. They aren't thinking a whole lot about other things; when they get home and sleep they're dreaming about solving their work puzzles.
>
> I'm really that way. I really like my work. Its problems that I'm thinking about [that] stay in my head. I'll wake up in the middle of the night and have an idea for something, [and] I'll run downstairs and write a note on it or something. I don't really, in that sense, draw a firm line between my work and the rest of my life. I just enjoy both... I think, in a perfect world, you don't have the distinction, [and] that work is just another part of life like everything else and that it's all just life. It's just that some of it is a life you get paid for, and some of it is not. That all of it is things that matter to you. I think [there is a] strong defense against thinking that your life is futile and fractured.

Michael felt that his life was not split into work and nonwork pursuits because he so passionately loved his work. Solving work problems gave him significant satisfaction during nonwork hours. He mentioned that he felt uneasy if he left a problem unresolved, and that he was better able to manage his stress if he continued to work on work problems at home after work hours.

Peter described similar feelings, and explained,

> When I get to a weekend, if there's an interesting problem that I've been working on, if I get some time during the weekend, I'll go up into my home office and work on it, not just because it's my job, but because I just love it. So, I've thought to myself on any number

> of occasions that I probably don't have enough hobbies. And I probably don't have enough male friends that I can just call up and say, "Hey, you want to hang out?" I guess in my more wistful moments, I sort of wish I did. Maybe that would be my idea of balance, but it's my choice, [and] I choose to be that way. Like this weekend, I sort of forced myself to go up and ski a little bit. But what was keeping me from doing [work] was that there was an interesting computer problem that I wanted to looked at, and I realized in my head that I'd spent too much time looking at it, and I'd be better off just going off and giving it a rest and come back to it. But I had to force myself to do that. So, I might not be very balanced, so I might not be the best person to talk about it. But, I'm imbalanced because it's the way I want to be, if that makes any sense.

For both Michael and Peter, their passion for their work did not stop when working hours stopped. They brought their work problems home and framed this practice as a positive way that they constructed their lives outside of their workplaces.

Other interviewees also resisted the notion of work–life balance. For example, Shawn resisted the idea that work and life were separate entities at all. He argued,

> I don't think it's separated by time slot necessarily because there are times when I'm at [work] and I'm in the office, and being in the office, I think you have to live life where you're working. [You need to] take time to see how the people around you are doing and build those relationships. That's life, too, and, so, a work–life balance is being a human in that situation, instead of just being a robot trying to get my stuff done. It's not like I'm a machine performing only one thing at one time.

For Shawn, the overlap of work and life was necessary, inevitable, and beneficial for his conception of a balanced life.

Phillip also asserted that distinctions between work and nonwork were impractical. He explained,

> I could technically work from nine-to-five, 40 hours a week, but it's just not realistic. It's just not something that exists. What if during those hours there's no work to be done, or there's nothing interesting happening, or I'm bored? I find I get a lot of work done when I want to get work done. You know, I need to think about problems. Anything can be done, I just need to think about how to do it. So, I find I work often at night [and so] there's no relevance to sort of that status quo [of] nine-to-five in this industry [and particularly] in web development, in programming, in engineering, and stuff.

In Phillip's example, dividing work and nonwork by time was useless.

Desmond also noted that the distinction between work and life was not particularly useful. He described the practice of socializing with work acquaintances as a gray area that complicated a neat work–life binary, and described,

> Some companies attempt to promote the idea of work–life balance, and they introduce different social aspects of company picnics and they provide facilities where employees can take part in some other social aspects. It may be a social club or maybe a get-together to do something [where] the people you see are all people from your own company. These are the coworkers. And people, invariably, would talk about work or work-related issues. So, in my mind, I don't get involved with those types of activities and I think those types of activities are kind of a gray area. [They] could be considered a life outside of work, [but] on the other hand, [they are] so closely related or closely organized by the company itself [that] a lot of people consider it kind of work.

> For example, think about a company picnic. People will say, "But I don't wanna' go to a picnic!" I see my workers all day and I don't want to go to my company picnic. And people will say, "Oh you better go, otherwise you're not a team member," or something like that. So they feel obliged to go, and even though they may go and they play a game of baseball, there is still, for many people, the perception that it's kinda work.

Casting work and nonwork pursuits as work–life by activity is problematized in Desmond's example, and the people involved or present during these activities are implicated in whether or not the activity is work or nonwork.

Hence, as these examples demonstrate, work–life was resisted by many interviewees and was, at times, deemed irrelevant because of their passion for work and because of the gray area of work and nonwork pursuits. This connects to the influence of entrepreneurial thinking and the pressure to be responsible for one's own professional development. When individuals are responsible for their own careers, they can more easily blur the lines between work and life because both are viewed as expressly helping the individual. How organizations benefit from this pattern is left unchallenged, and individuals are seen to "choose" to make work life and life work. As the next subsection describes, interviewees also found the distinction between work and life irrelevant or unnecessary because they already feel balanced with flextime.

Flextime

The data revealed that workers used the discursive resource of "flextime" to embrace the concept of balance. Interviewees described how they achieved balance through flextime, but also how flextime was used to resist the notion that leaves of absence were important or necessary. The men interviewed claimed they did not find balance through leaves of absence at

all. In fact, balance was quite disconnected from leaves of absence for the interviewees in this study. The interviewees did not desire balance, and others already felt they were balanced, and explicated that this balance was facilitated through a combination of flextime and virtual work options. As such, employees found leaves of absence unnecessary because they already had balance and because they could satisfactorily maintain their work and nonwork pursuits through flextime and virtual work.

For example, Doug explained:

> The newer trends are things like flex time [and] working from home, but taking long leaves is definitely frowned upon. I think having the freedom to take a day whenever you need or [to] take a half-day, or just leave for a few hours actually accomplished balance in a better way than long periods of time away . . . Not being confined to rigid hours or a rigid work-type structure leads to better work–life balance, because you can deal with things that could be stressful to you, like if you couldn't just deal with them right away then they would lead to stress.
>
> And I think removing that stress is what maintains work–life balance. I don't think it necessarily has to be a certain number of hours away, or even necessarily a rigid separation between the two. Taking the kids to the park and working on your laptop, that's a very blurry thing. But that contributes to work–life balance. I don't think it's necessarily a dividing line between “this is work” and “this is life.” Taking a leave doesn’t accomplish this [rather,] it creates more stress because you aren’t getting stuff done at work.

For Doug, taking longer leaves of absence created stress because work would build up. In this way, it paradoxically hurts the balance of work and nonwork pursuits. Thus, Doug found flextime to be more beneficial for finding work–life balance than leaves of absence.

Liam also explained how he viewed balance as facilitated through flextime:

> Flexibility is balance. Some people like to take an extended lunch and work later, and some people don't. So, I think a regular work schedule really just means being here for certain meeting time hours. We never schedule meetings outside of certain hours, and as long as you're here for that, and then as long as you get your work done, you're largely considered that you've put in a regular work schedule. And so it often means, you know, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., you're here, and then from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Then, how you work your actual work in with your lunch, or anything else that you need to do during the day, is a little more flexible, and that actually feels like balance to me. There's an element of flexibility in there as well.

Flexibility, in this example, is an important way that the interviewees felt they were able to achieve balance in their organizations.

As another example, Quentin explained,

> I was at one project for a while that actually had a cool program where they allowed you to work a flex schedule. So, over the course of two weeks, you could work nine 9-hour days instead of ten 8-hour days, and then take a day off anytime that you wanted, which was a cool thing. I didn't have a family at the time, but just having that extra day off, even though I'm working longer throughout the regular week, it's just not noticeable. But then having a whole day off to be able to do whatever—just take a three-day weekend, essentially, every other weekend—was really cool as far as work–life balance goes.

To Quentin, having the ability to take a day or two or to fit nonwork pursuits into his regular workweek was more desirable than taking a longer period of time away from work. Furthermore, as Adam explained, “one month vacation seems too long, you kind of get bored. I’d miss work”. Thus, for Quentin and Adam and many other interviewees, occupational identity is such an important piece of life that to separate it out felt objectionable.

In this subsection, I’ve described how the discursive resource of flextime is used to make sense of balance. Because work was such an integral part of life for the men in this study, balance was not found through leaving it for long periods of time. Instead, flextime was discursively used to express how balance could be found and maintained. In the next subsection, I will discuss a final discursive resource the interviewees used to make sense of balance: outliers.

Outliers

The final discursive resource that the data revealed in answer to research question three about how interviewees understood or resisted balance was the concept of outliers. A majority of the interviewees made statements or briefly mentioned that they, personally, were outliers because they were balanced workers. They said things like, “I have to say that I’m quite a bit different than other techies” or “this is probably not a typical answer,” to describe themselves as different from the stereotypical unbalanced technical worker.

For example, A.J. explained, “I don’t know how my answer’s going to measure up to everybody else, because my data, I’m probably going to assume, is going to be an outlier for your research.” Another interviewee said, “I hope I don’t throw off your project because I’m so different.” Thus, claiming outlier status was used to gain positive face in relation to balance. Moreover, it is likely that people do not want to be considered unbalanced. As such, claiming outlier status suggests that the industry is regularly unbalanced, but that the individual has

somehow avoid the pitfalls in order to remain personally balanced. Outlier status was attributed to two main functions: luck in industry position and strategic move for balance, each which will be explained below

Some of the interviewees mentioned that they felt lucky because their organizations supported work–life balance and categorized their organizations as outliers. These interviewees made comments such as "I've just been pretty lucky with the companies I've been in," and "I've been fortunate that my manager really supports my need for family time." Framing themselves as lucky or fortunate indicated that they recognized industry problems, but also that they personally were able to avoid some of the negative traps of their occupation and were thus able to have or achieve balance. Thus there is recognition of widespread occupational imbalance, but little direct blame on the individual's personal choices or organizational policies or culture, which were frequently labeled as outliers. This notion conflicts with the interviewees' use of discursive resources that suggest that finding balance is a personal choice.

Other interviewees who claimed outlier status (either explicitly or implicitly) asserted that they had used strategic tactics to ensure their own balance. For example, one interviewee explained,

> You have to figure it out for yourself. I know that I'm different than most of the guys you're talking to, but that's because I figured it out when I was young. I left [a big organization] purposefully and went to work for a smaller firm so that I could have balance. I did the whole "workaholic" thing and I'm done with that. It doesn't have to be all work, but you have to be smart about that in your career choices or you can easily stay in the wrong place.

This interviewee's strategic career moves enabled him to achieve work–life balance.

Another interviewee shared a similar ideology, albeit in a conflicting example. He claimed,

> That's why I've stuck with big firms and never did a startup. Startups are the ones who have no balance. They may get more glory, maybe, but they are totally imbalanced. Working for a big company is a lot of work at first, but it also has some structures for you to gain more and more balance the longer you are there, and that is in writing. They guarantee you time off for balance.

In this example, organizational choice was also strategic for balance purposes, although it presents support for large organizations. Here the notion of entrepreneurialism works to keep the interviewee away from start up firms, as he perceived his own career advancement and work-life balance were better facilitated in large firms.

In a final (and also conflicting) example, another interviewee explained,

> I went into business for myself a long time ago so I don't have to think about work–life balance at all. There are no policies, just what I want to do, or not do, in terms of work—or life.

In this case, entrepreneurialism itself facilitated balance. The way that entrepreneurialist Discourses are drawn upon in conflicting ways to justify work-life choices is difficult to tease out. At once these Discourses push some men out of big organizations and also pull them in. These interviewees did not agree on which organizational size or structure best facilitated work–life balance, but they did agree that they strategically "picked" positions that best suited their personal work–life needs.

In summary, the third research question asked about which discursive resources men in technical occupations used to make sense of work–life "balance" or to resist its imposition. Five

evident discursive resources emerged through the data, including: (1) burnout avoidance, (2) family, (3) that work–life is irrelevant for true technicians, (4) flextime, and (5) outlier mentality. The discursive resources utilized seemed to vary in importance across the interviews. There were complimentary relationships and contradictions between the use of these discursive resources that suggest inconsistencies in the ways in which the men in this study understood and internalized the Discursive frameworks from which they were acting.

Conclusion

To answer the research questions set forth in this study, this chapter identified findings that emerged from the data. For the first research question: (How) do male computer scientists and engineers construct their occupational identity?, patterns emerged in the data to support three main findings: (1) that technical workers love for their work, particularly because it afforded the opportunity to save or change the world; (2) that technical workers have an incredible passion; and (3) that technical identities were innate, stemmed from childhood, and frequently presided over other identities and roles. The second research question asked: What (if any) Discourses do male computer scientists and engineers draw upon to describe their leave-taking practices? The men in this study did draw upon specific Discourses and explained their practices in five main ways, including: (1) that the uniqueness of technical culture complicates leave-taking; (2) that leave practice depends upon the supportive or unsupportive work environment; (3) that work and career are individual responsibilities, and so leave depends on individual goals; (4) that gendered expectations preclude men from taking leaves of absence; and (5) that leaves of absence are mitigated by virtual work, vacation time, or quitting. Finally, the third research question asked: What discursive resources do high-tech male workers use to make sense of “balance” or to resist its imposition? Four discursive resources were identified in the data that the interviewees used to

understand and also to resist the imposition of “balance,” including: (1) burnout avoidance, (2) family, (3) the idea that work–life is irrelevant for true technicians, (4) flextime, and (5) outlier mentality. In the next, and final, chapter, I discuss both theoretical and practical implications of these findings, including introducing a new “glass” metaphor, the glass *handcuff*, and identify how this research illuminates the need for social justice research to benefit both individuals and organizations.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

This dissertation sought to understand the practices of leave-taking by men in computer science and engineering occupations. The research questions guiding this project aimed at (1) identifying Discourses that influence men's leave-taking practices, (2) understanding the perceptions men in technical careers hold about work–life balance, and (3) documenting how men in technical careers construct their occupational identities. This final chapter discusses how this dissertation addressed these questions, and considers both theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

To do so, this chapter first presents the theoretical contributions, including the relevance and implications of the Discourses of entrepreneurialism and of technical occupations that are prevalent in the findings. The theoretical discussion culminates in the presentation of a new metaphor for occupational and organizational behavior. Second, the practical implications of the study are presented, including best practices for work–life policies in general, and suggestions for leave policy implementation and research, in particular. Finally, the chapter explains some limitations of this project and directions for future research, and reflects on how these research contributions illuminate the need for social justice research to benefit both individuals and organizations.

Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contributions from this study emerged from the Discourses evident in the data. In particular, the data revealed a heavy emphasis on Discourses of entrepreneurialism and a Discourse I label, *Tech is Special*, which alludes to the unique properties of technical work and that assumption that technical people are also unique. The presence and use of the *Tech is*

Special Discourse suggests that occupational identities and Discourses play a critical role in understanding work–life policy. As such, I argue here that occupational identity is particularly relevant for any discussion of work–life, and, as such, can no longer be left out of work–life research. The analysis of these Discourses culminated in the development of a new metaphor, *the glass handcuff* to capture the way work–life policies and practices function in technical occupations. The glass handcuff illuminates the way that *entrepreneurialism and technical occupational Discourses work biased ways to perpetuate inequality in organizations.*

Discourse of Entrepreneurialism

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the Discourse of entrepreneurialism refers to the ideology that workers are personally responsible for their own success. At work, this leads to assumptions that good workers are autonomous, engage in self-surveillance and self-improvement, and can and will do whatever it takes to succeed and achieve. Further, as discussed, the entrepreneurial ideal is impossible to achieve, and entrepreneurial Discourses are gendered, raced, and classed. In this section, I expand the discipline's current understanding about the Discourse of entrepreneurialism to reveal how our concepts of work–life "balance" are tightly wrapped within this discursive frame.

A deconstruction of entrepreneurial Discourse reveals that it is at the heart of current conceptions of work–life "balance." The gendered nature of entrepreneurialism works to reproduce and reify the binary of public–private by engaging in traditional domain practices that push women out of organizations while simultaneously keeping men in. At this point, implications of this study for both men and women become more transparent. If the Discourse itself is gendered, it has competing, conflicting, and complimentary affects on women and men. For example, P. Lewis' (2006) study of women entrepreneurs found that the female participants'

commitment to entrepreneurship was perceived by women as a means to achieve *better* work–life balance. In this way, the Discourse of entrepreneurialism is understood as an alternative Discourse whereby women embrace entrepreneurialism as a way to subvert organizational control over their private lives, not as a force that subjugates them. Whether women leave traditional organizations to start their own businesses or because they are unable to "balance" work–life commitments in the same way as their male counterparts in entrepreneurial organizations, the effect is the same: women draw upon entrepreneurialist Discourse to inform their work–life practices.

Moreover, even if women are "choosing" to leave organizations, the men-as-public/women-as-home binary is reinforced. For this reason, both the deconstruction and analysis of entrepreneurialism, as influences conceptions of work–life "balance," are critical for moving beyond the binary of work–life, which, by itself, may not be very productive. Entrepreneurialist Discourse make available specific choices for workers managing work and nonwork concerns, but the Discourse has become so embedded in individual identity that it is not readily recognized as shaping available options.

Thus, because of the gendered nature of entrepreneurialism, "choice" and "balance" also work in gendered ways, putting unequal pressure on women and men to conform to entrepreneurialist ideals both in and outside of organizations. While women are pushed out of organizational spheres, men are locked in[8]. This binary gridlock of public–private reduces actual

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[8] Here "in" refers to work in general, not necessarily to being in a physical building. Many of the men studied here work virtually and were not always tied to a particular employer. Thus, the glass handcuff alludes to a commitment to work, but not necessarily to a particular workplace.

choice for both men and women as they attempt to manage their work and nonwork lives. Hence, widening understandings of the powerful, invisible, and masculine Discourse(s) of entrepreneurialism can help create an opening for helping both men and women to emancipate themselves. More specifically, women could potentially achieve equity in organizations and home, while men could potentially unlock the organizational cages that hold them at work.

In doing so, applying a critical lens to entrepreneurialism and in understanding how it impacts work–life "balance" is necessary. When individuals take on the burden of advancement, a loophole is effectively created for organizations, which are alleviated of responsibility for their workers. This seems an obvious danger, in that if organizations are not responsible for their employees, what happens to work–life programs that support employees?

Thus, by making work–life "balance" an individual problem (e.g., rather than a community problem), work–life policies become increasingly ineffective as workplace culture takes over. Significant propaganda supporting the entrepreneurial movement is available and broadly accepted in our culture, and, hence, we are being indoctrinated without careful analysis and are likely oblivious to potentially harmful effects. In addition to *entrepreneurial* Discourse, the data from this study revealed that workers in technical occupations drew upon particular *occupational* Discourses to describe their work–life balance practices.

The Uniqueness of Technical Work and Workers

The findings in this study also revealed that men in technical occupations regularly drew upon occupational Discourses and identities to explain their work–life practices. Interviewees overwhelmingly explained that their occupations were different from other occupations and that the people who engage in technical work were different as well. To this end, technical work *is* different from other kinds of work in many ways. For example, there are different career issues

compared to other professional careers (e.g., because of the fast moving pace of innovation and development, skill attrition is a deep and valid concern; Grant & Payton, 2008).

Furthermore, workers' claims and excitement about changing the world are not unfounded. Many of the interviewees and the men profiled in the popular press books examined in this study have quite literally saved or changed the world through various technical innovations. For example, interviewees worked on space shuttles and U.S. defense technology, and Steve Jobs, perhaps the most iconic technical worker, changed a number of industries with his innovations. Indeed, working in these careers is one way to contribute to history in ways that other careers might not do. In addition, these kinds of careers offer higher than average pay, require extensive education from a young age, and demand technical expertise. Thus, gaining technical expertise thus becomes a central focus for the occupational identity of technical workers.

Nearly every interviewee named technical expertise as among the most important and prevalent characteristics of workers in these fields. In many cases, individual workers are, quite literally, irreplaceable because they possess a specific skill that is not shared by many others. This situation, however, is not unique to technical fields. In general, the process of *professionalization* occurs by casting individual workers and expertise as a commodity (see, e.g., Abbott, 1988; Ashcraft, in press). As such, if expertise is a commodity that individuals possess, those individuals are not expendable in organizations. Thus, while it is strategically smart for individuals to gain expertise, expertise also makes it incredibly difficult for those workers to step away from the work.

The data also revealed that technical workers believed that technical careers draw in a specific type of person. The notion that one must have a true, innate passion for technical work

was described in nearly every interview and was also prevalent in the mass media books. Workers described being a specific personality type, a certain kind of analytical mind, highly dedicated, and/or loving the work passionately or obsessively. Some interviewees had difficulty with questions about work–life balance because so much overlap existed between the two realms. There was a clear assumption that the "kind of person" who would be successful in technical careers was a particular designation. Put simply, the data revealed a strong assumption that some people are "destined" to perform these occupations, while others are not, and also that there is an inherent, possibly biological, explanation for people who excel in technical careers, as compared to those who do not.

The occupational Discourse largely assumes a static nature of technical occupations. Sentiments such as "tech is just different" emphasize the idea that technical occupations are something that we can define, which exist in an unchangeable way. Technical occupations are described as emerging naturally and as structured in the way that best suits the work and the assumed workers. The data revealed that technical workers believe both that they are uniquely suited for the work and also that technical work is not suitable for everyone. The popular press books and colloquial knowledge certainly support this position. Hence, technical work is often characterized and caricatured as the realm of obsessed workaholics with an intense passion for their work.

These assumptions, however, are problematic. When occupations are naturalized and institutionalized, the opportunity for change is nearly impossible and, as such, increasing diversity and equality is subsequently unlikely. Ashcraft's (in press) *glass slipper* theory revealed that occupations are not magically or naturally created, but are, instead, developed specifically for certain bodies. The *glass slipper* theory explained how occupations are

structured so that they appear to be a natural, innate calling for some workers, and by extension, as a highly implausible or improbable career choice for others. The *glass slipper* metaphor illustrates the near impossibility of slipping on an occupation that was not designed for you. The "natural fit" seems like an innate privilege, but the magic of the shoe's specific construction for some workers recesses into the background just as the naturalness of some workers' fit into some occupations takes temporary permanence. In effect, "there is nothing 'natural' about slipping comfortably into a shoe designed exclusively for your foot" (Ashcraft, in press, p. 13).

If, however, we begin to recognize that the *nature* of work and the *natural* worker are *not* fixed or "natural" entities, but, rather, are constructs developed over time, we can begin to realize that change is possible (see, e.g., Britton, 2000; Ashcraft, in press). Indeed, occupational identity is only temporarily fixed and is thus open for (re)negotiation. Renegotiation, then, presents an opportunity for increased social justice and equality in technical occupations. Moreover, because this work is regularly characterized as highly gendered, the opportunity to increase equality must occur through a (re)assignment of what technical occupations "are like." By reimagining technical occupations as suitable for other kinds of people, change is indeed possible.

Grasping the constructed nature of technical work and the ideal technical worker is, then, quite essential to the goals of this project. In order to increase equity for white women and workers of color in technical careers, it is necessary to dispel the myth that technical work is only suitable for particular people. In addition, it is also necessary to recognize the ways in which the work itself has been structured to suit its ideal worker. It is here that the ramifications of naturalizing technical work and technical workers connect with the goals of this project.

Work hours and extensive time expectations in most occupations were designed around an ideal type worker, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, as workplaces and workers have

changed, occupational structures have not changed in response. The assumed fixed nature of occupations has hardened around work assumptions that only fit certain workers. Work–life policies largely reflect this ideology, and these policies have mostly been fit into existing occupational structures with little, if any, thought to revising the work structure itself. For example, as presented in the findings of this project, leaves of absence are considered unnecessary, undesirable, or not good business for the majority of technical workers interviewed. Technical work (like other occupations) was designed for white, heterosexual, partnered, and abled men, who did not need to take leaves of absence. Thus, taking a leave of absence in these occupations is not considered to be good for one's career, if it is considered at all. Moreover, occupational culture has solidified so much around the notion that technical work must occur as a passionate, round-the-clock endeavor, which leaves of absence and other kinds of work–life initiatives have been slow to gain traction. Technical workers, and male technical workers in particular, do not take leaves from their technical work because leave-taking is not an option that fits with either the structure of technical work or with the needs of the ideal technical worker.

Furthermore, the way technical workers have made sense of leaves of absence is contested and complicated. Drawing upon an array of discursive resources that at once complement and contradict each other, the men in this study both resisted and embraced leave-taking practice and work–life balance. Even as the men claimed an "authentic" identity, they spoke across competing Discourses largely without critical examination or challenge. Thus, a number of paradoxes arose through the combination of the discursive resources.

For example, even when claiming they were completely "balanced," the men also claimed they would not take leaves of absence except to avoid burnout, which they asserted made them better workers. As another example, some men said that leave–taking practice is

appropriate for women—without judgment, but was not a practice they would engage in, for fear of ruining their careers. As a final example, many men claimed to have taken a leave of absence, which was actually an accumulation of their funded vacation time. These kinds of tensions were left unproblematized and, as such, contribute to the notion that contradictions and conflict are part of an authentic technical occupational identity.

The findings presented in Chapter 6 revealed that many men in technical occupations do not consider leaves of absence as a good career choice, or do not have leaves of absence on their radar at all, or believe that leaves of absence are not necessary (e.g., because they can find balance through flex policies or because they do not wish to leave their work). However, all the men interviewed in this study were personally supportive of other workers taking leave and most viewed themselves as balanced.

These findings are a bit perplexing and create a difficult double standard. If leaves are supported for others, yet not a move that most men in technical occupations would take themselves, there remains an invisible judgment about taking a leave, which has quite visible material and immaterial consequences. The data were mixed in regards to whether or not workers were constrained from taking a leave in their particular organizations (i.e., some interviewees were aware of organizational backlash for taking leave, while others found that leaves were supported). This finding might suggest that some men are viewing leave in more favorable terms while others continue to believe that it is a policy primarily for women. However, those workers who felt supported acknowledged the uniqueness of their supportive situation and also recognized that they were unusually lucky to have support in an industry that does not typically support workers' leaves. The power constraints that keep men from taking leaves of absence, particularly in technical occupations is detailed in the next section.

Glass Metaphors

The use of glass metaphors to explain problems in working environments is prevalent because *glass* captures the essence of something people cannot always see, but can feel. In other words, we can quite literally feel if we bump into a glass door, even if we didn't see it coming. Glass metaphors are particularly helpful in capturing notions of power in organizations, and have been used specifically to understand how subtle biases toward certain bodies in organizations (e.g., white women and workers of color) face intangible discrimination at work. For example, Ashcraft (in press) explained

> The utility of glass metaphors lies in their capacity to name and evoke systemic patterns that are otherwise elusive. They provide tangible abbreviations or proxies that redirect us from individual explanations (e.g. willful prejudice) to institutional accounts, surfacing hidden dynamics at work that call for further explanation. (p. 12)

Indeed, glass metaphors serve as a discursive resource that we can use to talk about the goings-on of organizational life that are otherwise difficult to describe and these metaphors can help us to understand and analyze the hidden dynamics that can harm some employees at work. While glass metaphors distinctly focus on gender and racial inequalities at work, glass, of course, can be broken. Thus, glass metaphors suggest invisible barriers that can be shattered though the processes of imagining work and workers in new ways.

The Glass Ceiling

Existing literature on glass metaphors has illuminated some discriminatory practices in organizations. For example, the notion of the *glass ceiling* is likely the best known glass metaphor, and describes an invisible barrier that white women and workers of color hit when climbing the ranks of an organization, because women are not represented numerically and are

not compensated equally in the upper echelons of organizations (Powell, 1999; Ashcraft & Blithe, 2009). This *glass ceiling* metaphor has become so pervasive in describing organizational life that the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) emerged to study progress, opportunities, and constraints stemming from the glass ceiling. As such, the glass ceiling has largely become a catch-all for most racial and gender inequality in organizations, which suggests that inequality occurs in a variety of ways and, as such, in order to truly understand the diverse nature of inequality, it is necessary to be more precise in the way we talk about inequalities as they occur for white women, women of color, men of color, and white men (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, Vannemen, 2001; Maume, 1999).

The Glass Escalator

Williams (1992) described a similar invisible mechanism: the *glass escalator* effect (p. 256), which described the intense pressure white men and men of color working in female-dominated occupations or specialties faced to advance into more traditionally masculine professions. For example, Williams found that a male public librarian was praised for his excellence in storytelling but critiqued for not advancing, and that a male social worker was quickly moved into administration. Williams also tracked male nurses and teachers who were pushed or fast-tracked into administration by both men in managerial positions and their female peers. Thus, while white women and women of color faced a *glass ceiling*, white men and to some extent, men of color, were pushed onto a *glass elevator*.

The Glass Cliff

Taking the glass metaphors further, Ryan and Haslam (2007) described the *glass cliff*, a phenomenon in which white women and workers of color are given leadership positions that are particularly risky or precarious. While it was suggested that women leaders were responsible for

declining profits in their organizations, Ryan and Haslam (2007) found instead that when the companies' performances were analyzed before the appointment of the women leaders, there were clear indications of a pending decline. Thus, appointing women at precarious moments sets those women up for failure. This pattern occurs markedly more often for women and men of color than for white men. This metaphor has recently been taken up with mass appeal in discussions of Barak Obama's presidency of the United States of America.

The Glass Slipper and the Glass Closet

The recent additions of Ashcraft's (in press) *glass slipper* and Musto's (2008) *glass closet* suggest that glass metaphors remain quite useful. As explained earlier in this chapter, the *glass slipper* metaphor captures the way occupations are historically constructed to appear natural for certain workers, and makes obvious systematic biases in organizations. The colloquial *glass closet* describes a "complex but popular contraption that allows public figures to avoid the career repercussions of any personal disclosure while living their lives with a degree of integrity" (Musto, 2008, p. 1). Each of these glass metaphors function to describe invisible mechanisms that, when analyzed, reveal significant biases that advantage some and disadvantage others.

The Glass Handcuff

Extending the power of glass metaphors, here I suggest a new addition to the family: the *glass handcuff*. The *glass handcuff* explains *the invisible mechanism that keeps men continually working while simultaneously keeping them away from family and other nonwork pursuits*. The data in this study revealed four main logics which kept men at work: (1) that men cannot take leave, (2) that men should not take leave, (3) that men do not need to take leave, and (4), that men do not want to take time completely away from work. The *glass handcuff* serves as a

metaphor that can capture each of these logics, and will be drawn upon in various ways to explain why men do not usually take leaves of absence in technical occupations.

Many men interviewed for this study claimed that they could not take a leave of absence because they needed their paychecks or because they were afraid to lose their jobs. This suggests a serious material constraint precluding men from taking leaves of absence. Because of sex segregation in occupations and job roles, men are still the literal breadwinners in most families. Even in families where both parents work, the majority of men earn more money.[9]

Particularly in the case of parental leave, men cited that they had to work to support their wives who were staying home or taking a leave. While some men were financially able to take a leave themselves, many cited that their families depended on their paychecks, and that they could not afford to take unpaid time off. Other men explained that they could not take leaves because they were afraid to lose their jobs.

Additionally, many men in this study personally experienced a layoff, or as one interviewee explained, were caught up in a "workforce reduction." The frequency of layoffs was explained as quite common in technical occupations, which require such specialized skills that workers were either deemed irreplaceable or as completely unnecessary. As such, men with jobs were fearful to leave in the chance that their managers discovered they were easily replaced in their absence. Many men cited that their organizational or occupational cultures did not support leave-taking practices for men, and that men who took leaves of absence were vulnerable to

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[9] This trend is perhaps changing. In difficult economic times, men fare worse in terms of layoffs and salary reductions. Women are cheaper, and thus retain their jobs more readily. However, in healthy economic climates, women still earn less than men in similar occupations and job roles, and many high-earning careers are still comprised of mostly male workers.

layoffs or other repositioning in the company. The contradiction in how the men positioned specialized skills as both making individuals replaceable and irreplaceable reveals a nuanced internalization of specialized skills as a discursive resource. These skills can work to make individuals special, but also makes them susceptible to the rapid change of technology, whereby their specialized skills could quite quickly and easily become obsolete. The financial concerns and job security fears are imperceptible constructs that keep these men at work. The *glass handcuff* captures this tendency because it suggests that men cannot take leave, even as the reasons are not noticeably visible.

The *glass handcuff* metaphor also captures the notion that men *should* not take leaves of absence. The data in this study revealed that most men felt responsible for their own career success. In technical occupations, career success regularly required sacrificing the "life" part of work–life and pushed men to believe that they should quit their jobs rather than request time off. The drastic measures to which men would go to protect their careers were unfair. Many men lamented that they wanted more time for their families and their hobbies, but felt compelled to sacrifice these pursuits, at least to some extent, in order to succeed at work. Many men wanted more time for their nonwork lives but felt they were unable to have it. This created an inequality with women in the accessibility of work-life policies. Individually protecting one's career also led to unhealthy behavior reported by the men in this study. Repeated stories about extreme dedication and work hours exemplified the tendency to work through anything (e.g., children's birth, personal health scares, and sleep). This potentially dangerous tendency to work though anything was positioned as a step that workers should take in order to advance quickly in their careers. That there was little talk of resistance suggests that the Discourse of entrepreneurialism was quite pervasive and internalized.

Similarly, taking leaves of absence went directly against organizational demands for extreme time commitments and, as such, seemed to suggest a lack of dedication except in (and also even in) the most extreme cases of injury or personal health issues. The stigma against workers (and particularly men) taking leaves of absence described in this logic persuaded many men in this study that taking a leave of absence could be detrimental to their career and that they must avoid such practice in order to succeed at work. Taking vacation time, working virtually, or quitting are some ways in which the men described avoiding "damaging" leaves of absence.

This stigma against leave-taking is so great that many men described actually quitting their jobs when they wanted to take significant time off. Taking time between jobs was an acceptable way that men took time away from work that was not considered detrimental to their careers. Rather, changing jobs was often positioned as a savvy career move, in that it normally created upward mobility. When men believe that taking a leave is detrimental to their careers, and that they make "choices" about how successful they want to be, the end result is an invisible force that keeps men working: the *glass handcuff*.

The third discursive resource utilized by the men in this study was that men in technical occupations did not need to take a leave of absence because of virtual work and partners. Many men cited virtual work as a phenomenon that has made leaves of absence unnecessary. Because they could work from anywhere, many men worked virtually during times when they might otherwise have taken a leave of absence. Men described working virtually during their own health problems or when they had children. Virtual work allowed men to take more time away from a physical office without getting too far behind on their work. As such, the workers who talked about virtual work praised the practice and their organizations for allowing them to have an increased work–life balance. However, the desire to keep up with work and the reluctance to

leave work are evidence of the *glass handcuff*. It is an invisible desire to continue engaging in work.

Some men in this study also talked about traditional gendered roles as a means of alleviating the need for leaves of absence for men. In this subset, leave=family and family=women's responsibility. Some men did not find they needed to take leaves of absence because they had partners to handle situations that might have required leave. For example, some men in this study described how their wives took care of ailing parents or children's needs, and, as such, their own presence was not necessary. The *glass handcuff* metaphor captures the way that traditional gender assumptions about roles and responsibilities lock men into their work roles and keeps them away from other nonwork parts of life.

Finally, men frequently described that they did not want to take a leave of absence because they loved their jobs so much that they did not want to leave. The *glass handcuff* metaphor is useful here because is illuminates how some men are bonded to their occupations by love and passion. The many men who described obsessive tendencies and inabilities to let go of work had an invisible pull to their occupations. It was difficult for them to describe, but was regularly explained as an innate drive and connection to technical work. These men did not want to stop working, and as such, pushed back against the notion of work and life existed and operated as separate spheres. Instead, for these men, work was life and life was work. The seamless bond here can again be explained by the *glass handcuff*, in that men do not take leaves of absence when they do not want to leave work because they are passionate about their jobs.

In essence, the *glass handcuff* metaphor captures the unseen apparatus, comprised of Discourses, practices, material constraints and gendered assumptions, which conditions men to work nonstop and cautions them against spending too much time on nonwork pursuits. Unlike

the *golden handcuffs*, which are explicit moves employers take to retain employees through non-compete agreements and financial incentives such as stock options (see, e.g., Kafker, 1993; Sengupta, Whitfield, & McNabb, 2007), the *glass handcuff* metaphor explains the *invisible* pulls that keeps workers, and particularly male workers, at work. The *glass handcuff* is also distinct from the *maternal wall*, which suggests a barrier for the career advance for mothers in the work place (Williams, 2003–2004) because it accounts for all life circumstances that might require time away from work and describes the lure to keep workers at work.

Implications of the glass handcuff phenomenon. There are three evident implications of the glass handcuff phenomenon. First, when men do not take time away from work, workers who do take leaves of absence look less committed to work. In other words, leaves of absence are situated as incompatible with technical work and with career success. This phenomenon has serious implications for parent workers, workers with disabilities, and women, who, as discussed in Chapter 2, are overwhelmingly responsible for caring for children, housework, and aging parents. Thus when these workers take leaves of absence, they suffer career consequences including fewer bonuses, less pay, loss of job, harassment at work, and lower performance evaluations.

A second implication of the *glass handcuff* phenomenon is that it explains the increasing difficulty that men experience in getting more involved in their family lives. A multitude of campaigns suggest that men's presence as fathers in the home might produce better adjusted children, decrease stress for mothers, and contribute to less crime. However, if men do not give up a portion of their time at work, they cannot possibly contribute as fully as they might in the home. The *Superwoman phenomenon* suggests that "doing it all" is not sustainable for long periods of time, and that there must be give in either women's life or work in order for them to

participate successfully in both. Thus, if men desire to participate more fully in their home spheres, they must be able to relinquish some of their time at work.

A third implication of the *glass handcuff* phenomenon is that it can create serious health problems for men. As discussed in Chapter 2, employees who work nonstop can incur serious health effects, even for white or gold collar workers. For example, severe stress, lack of sleep, back problems, obesity, and chronic eye or joint pain are just a few problems that emerge from uninterrupted desk work. Steve Jobs famously attributed his cancer to his extreme overworking habits. Other men in this study described putting off health treatments or checkups to work. Putting off checkups or treatments can create health problems and contribute to the shorter life expectancy for men.

A fourth and final implication of the *glass handcuff* metaphor is that it allows for the perpetuation of the ideal worker norm. By continually working, men are striving to be the ideal worker. This worker is unattached, has no responsibilities, and is healthy, independent, young, and completely committed to his or her organization. The pursuit of this ideal suggests that it is both possible to attain and desirable, despite practical implications that make it nearly impossible for workers to either achieve and sustain. Allowing the ideal worker to guide work policies is to ignore the structural inequalities that make the ideal even more difficult for some workers to achieve than for others. As such, if structural changes are to occur, the myth of the ideal worker must be exposed. Thus, in order for structural change and emancipation to become real possibilities for workers, it is necessary to recognize that the *glass handcuff* exists and has locked men on a metaphorical treadmill, running toward an impossible destination.

Practical Contributions

In addition to the above theoretical contributions, the findings of this dissertation also suggest a number of implications for policies that address work–life balance, in general, and for leave policy, in particular. Here, I present some suggested practices for work–life policies and research, and argue that FMLA must be reformed. Each point will be discussed in more detail below.

Men Must Play an Integral Role in Gender Reform

To begin, the data presented in this dissertation provide support for the notion that men must play an integral role in gender reform (Kimmel, 1996). In much work–life research, and particularly in feminist work, the focus of the study and the resulting discussions about equity focus largely on *women's* experiences. Moreover, equity itself is frequently characterized as a "women's" movement. However, organizational reform necessarily involves men, and achieving gender equity would include an improvement in the lives of both women *and* men (Tracy & Rivera, 2009). Thus, gender equality in organizations will not be realized until men shift their organizational practices and values.

Kimmel (1996) claimed that there have been some flawed attempts by feminists to analyze masculinity, and that feminists were unable to capture the nuances of masculinity because it was analyzed in comparison only to femininity. Work–life studies face a parallel problem in that they are most often framed as women's issues. When work–life policies and practices are studied with only women in focus, the essence, meaning, and implications of these policies and practices are lost.

The data also suggest that if work–life policies are to be successful and adopted in practice, leaders in organizations must fully embrace them. Bornstein (2000–2001) claimed,

> because male senior executives do not take leave, a cycle is perpetuated in which male employees identify success and achievement with minimal disruptions in work life. As long as these highest ranking employees do not take leave, there is an unspoken message that the top officials neither sanction for embrace such behavior. (p. 118–119)

Bornstein further contended that

> Senior managers must stand out front and wave the banner of family leave as acceptable for a valued and successful employee to take, and they must not penalize any employee, male or female, who takes such leave through diminished job prospects or limits to professional opportunity. (2000–2001, p. 123)

Thus, how high-ranking technical men do or do not mention leave is important for understanding prevailing Discourses of leave in technical occupations and organizations.

Additionally, Tracy and Rivera (2009) argued that the personal opinions of executive leaders hold significant influence over workplace policies and cultures, particularly including work–life benefits such as family leave. *How* and *whether* leaders model workplace behavior greatly impact how employees interpret organizational policies and cultures. Executives' everyday talk is equally influential, and the actual utilization of work–life benefits requires the endorsement of executives and employees' perception that they will not be punished or viewed as uncommitted if they exercise leave rights. Thus, if leaders claim to endorse work–life policies while simultaneously forgoing the use of such policies, employees will not assume that using policies is possible (Tracy & Rivera, 2009). In line with this literature, the men interviewed in this study clearly articulated that the support of lack of support from their managers, peers, and organizations played a large role in their personal leave taking practice.

Additionally, the findings of this dissertation suggest that work–life should be broadened to account for the wide array of "life" experienced by men. For the men in this study, "balance" is not always equivalent to family, despite the frequent conflation of the two. When asked about their conceptions of balance, interviewees spoke about their health more frequently than they spoke about their families. However, current framings of work–life policies sometimes favor family time as the only "life" option. This can cause incongruity with workers who do not have children and can make workers who actively raise children appear as if they decided to sacrifice their careers. As such, balance needs that arise around family are often dependent on where the workers are in their life cycle. For example, interviewed men with young children framed balance in terms of family almost unanimously; however, interviewed men without children and men with grown children had distinctively different notions of balance. Thus, disconnecting balance and family can open up the currently narrow scope of what "life" can mean for men and might be useful for reconstructing leave policies.

Finally, the men in this study clearly found both virtual work and flextime to be highly supportive in their endeavors for work–life balance. Virtual work and flextime were used to describe why leaves of absence were unnecessary for men in technical occupations because they allowed the men to conduct nonwork pursuits with minimal interruption to their careers. This then, is a contradictory recommendation, in that while virtual work and flexibility were cited as increasing work–life balance, they also functioned to eliminate the opportunity for men to take time off completely from work, which could hurt or diminish their work–life balance. Still, the workers in this study overwhelmingly credited these two work–life policies as providing a means to a balanced life, and claimed they were lucky to have access to such policies. More analysis of

these particular practices is needed, and could potentially illuminate some of the complexities of balance.

FMLA Must Be Reformed

The second practical implication stemming from these findings is that FMLA must be reformed. As it stands now, FMLA is raced, classed, ableist, and heteronormative. Currently, rights to paid maternity and parental leaves are given in every country in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) except for the United States (Kamerman & Moss, 2011). Because FMLA is unpaid, it privileges people who can financially support themselves for 12 weeks without pay. For low-income families or families with only one income, taking leave, thus, becomes exponentially more difficult. Additionally, in coupled families in which men earn more money, it is likely that men, in particular, cannot afford to take unpaid leave.

Moreover, in the United States, gender, class, occupation, familial structure, and race are intertwined so that many cannot afford to take unpaid time away from work. In this way, leave-taking is a seriously classed, raced, and heteronormative practice. Further, because managers determine whether or not health events qualify for FMLA, the policy is quite ableist in that it favors types of leaves that can be planned for ahead of time, and which might only occur once or twice in an employee's life (e.g., weddings, planned surgeries, planned pregnancies).

In light of these concerns, scholars studying leave policies have come to some general consensus about what must be done in order to improve FMLA. A great majority of available work suggests that FMLA parameters must be restructured, and some work suggests that FMLA interventions must occur at the organizational or managerial levels.

For example, Galtry (2002) argued that a comprehensive leave plan should have at least six months of leave to accommodate breastfeeding, and recommended longer parental leave periods for optimal child health. However, to maintain equity, she also recommended that families with two parents should choose which partner takes the leave, or could share leave. Galtry also claimed that organizational allowances for workers' part-time work, flextime, shorter working days, and other similar programs could help to support greater infant health.

As another example, Grill (1995–1996) reported that newly adopting parents are typically required to have one parent stay home with a newborn for six months by the adoption agency. Leave times must be lengthened to accommodate for these basic needs early in a child's life. Moreover, Kamerman and Moss (2011) suggested that we might build leave policies around a life. For example, each citizen might have an allocated paid leave time to use throughout his or her working life, and could use this leave for a range of reasons. Belgium has such an approach, and has realized several advantages, including eliminating potential hostility from nonparents.

Kim (1998) proposed a conceptual framework for analyzing the organizational factors that affect family leave implementation and suggested that we study the political environment (particularly where downsizing and efficiency are promoted), supervisory support, how federal and state policies interact, organizational culture, traditional gender-role perception (which ignores family as an organizational concern and can, thus, make it difficult for men to fully engage in familial concerns and, alternately, for women with families to be fully engaged in the workplace), and union commitments. Top-down support for work–family policies is imperative for policy success (Kim, 1998; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Boren & Johnson, 2008).

Kirby and Krone (2002) recommended training for managers about policies and in how to implement flexibility. Kirby and Krone further extolled the benefits of circulating success

stories of leave taking in organizations and promoting programs as companywide benefits rather than women's or parents' benefits. They also claimed that all employees should know the reasoning behind polices, including expectations and organizational benefits. Additionally, employees should be free to discuss their frustration or confusion about the policies, and should be invited to help find unique solutions to the work–family needs of their teams, such as trading coverage for time off.

Similarly, Wayne and Cordeiro (2003) claimed that training programs as part of managing diversity efforts should inform managers of how gender stereotypes may influence how men are perceived when using family policies, particularly by male managers. Organizations could also develop explicit policies stating that employees—male or female—who use family leave should not be discriminated against. Organizations should create a climate such that all employees feel encouraged to strike a balance between their work and nonwork lives.

Schultz (2007) studied what female faculty members know about their legal rights to leave law, and examined what these workers perceived as barriers to taking leave or as organizational politics, and explored the influence of interactions with colleagues and administrators in their leave taking decisions. Schultz discovered that information about family leave policy was difficult to locate and that administrators frequently told the women in their study that they could not use leave time because of a lack of resources.

Furthermore, Schultz (2007) found that the historical nonuse of family leave is one of the biggest barriers to taking leave. Taking leave is set up as taboo and strong messaging against it perpetuates in organizations, including both explicit and implicit messages that taking leave is detrimental to workers' careers. Theoretically, then, making leave policies easy to find and encouraging their use among employees would help alleviate some of the problems with

individuals exercising their leave rights. With this in mind, Gold (1996) envisioned a community where parents were automatically offered leaves and where leaves were viewed as good for everyone involved, including the college community, parents, and children. Gold also recommended that people who in non-self-serving roles and who are tenured are the ones who should advocate for leave.

Limitations

While the findings from this study imply some important conceptual and practical implications, these findings must be interpreted with consideration of some limitations that bind this research. These limitations include: potential biases due to a limited scope of data collected, including a nondiverse interview group; limitations of a studying only technical occupations; a lack of precision in the kinds of technical workers studied; and the foregrounding of men, which can reinforce the gender binary and might eclipse the feminist goals of this project. I will elaborate each limitation below.

First, the data collected were limited to interviews and popular texts. While this methodology can lead to deep insights about a specific population, it is not easily generalized and carries a potential for biases due to the limited scope. This is particularly the case for nondiverse interview samples. Indeed, men who volunteered for this study were mostly middle managers or higher-ranking individuals in their organizations. As such, they were primarily comprised of middle-upper class men who may were able to take time to conduct an interview. It is quite possible that lower ranking men in technical occupations would have answered the interview questions differently. In addition, this sample does not reflect great diversity of race, although it is reflective of national population statistics for technical occupations.

This leads to a second limitation: that only technical occupations were studied. The findings here suggested that occupational identity is critical for understanding how work–life policies and practices develop. However, because only one occupation was studied in this dissertation, it presents a limited amount of data for only this occupation and technical organizations. Hence, while this information is useful for organizations and research that focuses on STEM careers, this dissertation can only speak to technology and engineering.

A third and related limitation is that I was not precise enough in specifying people interviewed for this study. Although there was much cohesion in the kinds of answers that emerged from some of the interview questions, I also sensed that the occupations of some of the interviewees were quite different from each other. This was complicated by the size of the organization, which seemed to play a large role in determining how the interviewees practiced work–life.

Finally, conducting gender research that focuses only on "men" risks reinforcing the gender binary. While I contend that emancipation requires an understanding of both men and women, I also recognize that the concept of "both men and women" is limiting. I considered eliminating gender as a requirement for the interview sample, but because there is such a difference in the work–life practices of people who identify as men and people who identify as women, I wanted to investigate this further. Studying gender is quite often a slippery slope, in that it is easy to rely on simple categories that do not capture the complexity of gender. Gender is so complex, in fact, that I was not able to capture it all here. Thus, my reliance on categories was not merely one of convenience, but rather a strategic tactic used to highlight the way work–life policies are gendered with the ultimate goal of emancipation. Future work should certainly take the findings from this study and move beyond this categorical frame.

In addition, studying only men risks eclipsing the important goals of emancipation for everyone in organizations. Conducting a study that might further privilege white men at the expense of other workers is a serious and upsetting risk of this work. I have proposed that the men in this study should be emancipated from the constraints that keep them at work for their own sake, but also so that women can enter and exit their organizations with less stigma and material consequences. This driving goal might be overlooked because of the relative novelty of studying men in relation to work–life. The emphasis that men and masculinity and women and femininity are always constructed in light of the other is critical for the dual goals of emancipating men from work and creating more equal opportunities for women at work to be realized.

Future Research

The findings in this dissertation revealed that this line of inquiry on men's leave-taking practices in technical jobs can reveal much about occupations, occupational identities, and gendered assumptions, particularly as these concepts relate to work–life policy and practice. However, there are some interesting and important areas that were not adequately addressed here, but that should be the focus of future work. Specifically, conducting an intersectional analysis that moves beyond simple categories and studying other occupations and occupational identities are exciting directions with which to take this work.

The limits of this project did not allow for a complete intersectional analysis, but such a project should be conducted in the future. In particular, how race, class, ability, nationality, and age impact work–life decisions is of significant importance and promises to uncover even more about the complexities of work–life policies and practices. The data here revealed some interesting threads that might begin future intersectional analyses. Age, in particular, exposed

differences in the ways that the men studied considered work–life. For example, the men interviewed with young children showed a greater knowledge of existing policies and focused most of their nonwork attention on their families, while younger men and older men with no children or with grown children found the "life" part of work–life did not focus on family. Thus broadening existing conceptions about work–life based on this kind of intersectional analysis would be revealing.

A second thread started in this project is the leave-taking practices of workers from other countries. These workers were cited to be able to take two or three months off at a time to go home. Future research could explore how these practices impact workers' career trajectories and how these workers perceive how their careers are impacted are interesting complexities of leave practice.

Future work should also address other occupations. This project only begins to dig into the breadth of knowledge found at the intersection of work–life and occupational identity. Studying other occupations, particularly working class occupations, would be relevant and important. It might also be interesting to study female-dominated occupations, or other kinds of occupations that are constructed in different ways than technical occupations.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to document the perceptions and actual practices of technical men, including the Discourses used by men to describe leave taking practices, the discursive resources used by men to make sense of "balance" or to resist its imposition, and men's construction of technical occupational identities. This study provided insight into the work–life balance perceptions and practices of an understudied construct and population, in an attempt to help achieve gender equality in organizations and in "life."

Additionally, this research developed and explored a new metaphor that will hopefully be of interest to organizational communication scholars, the *glass handcuff*, which represents the often-overlooked tensions and assumptions constituted through occupational identities, particularly in relation to gender. In doing these things, this dissertation offered important insights to the field of communication, to organization, and to feminist and management scholars who seek to bring a communicative lens to occupational identity and, simultaneously, to advance the theoretical and practical discipline of communication. Because of the relentless and intertwined gendered Discourses of balance, choice, entrepreneurialism, and occupation, organizational members are still wrestling with combining work and nonwork pursuits. Whether workers are on the outside trying to break in, or are handcuffed to their work, these organizational members are not able to adequately "choose" how they manage their work and life commitments. As such, much more work is required before scholars can even attempt to throw such a pervasive organizational control practice off balance.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Sarah Blithe, a graduate research assistant for NCWIT is conducting a study about work–life balance in computer science and engineering and is looking for male computer scientists or engineers who are voluntary participants.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are or might know a computer scientist or engineer.

Sarah is conducting 45 minute- 1 hour interviews with willing participants. She will ask questions about your personal experiences and perceptions about work–life balance in computer science or engineering.

If you are recommending a computer scientist or engineer for this study, or if you are a participant in this study, you will be asked to provide the names of other potential subjects. You have the right to decline to provide this information. Please be sure you have interested potential subjects contact the principle investigator directly at sarah.blithe@colorado.edu and do not reveal their names without the recommended participant's permission.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, concerns regarding this project, or dissatisfaction with aspects of this study, you may report them -- confidentially if you wish -- to the Institutional Review Board, 3100 Marine Street, Rm A15, 563 UCB, (303) 735-3702. Copies of the University of Colorado Assurance of Compliance to the federal government regarding human subject research are available upon request from the Graduate School address listed above.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

These interviews are audio recorded and will later be transcribed. You do not have to consent to audio recording. You have the right to refuse audio recording.

Some questions are potentially sensitive in nature, such as asking you to discuss your perceptions about balance. Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or to stop participating at any time. If there is a question you would rather not answer, you have the right not to answer.

Some writing will come from this project: (1) graduate dissertation (2) scholarly conference papers or journal articles. If you agree to be interviewed, your identity will be kept confidential, but your words might be used in the scholarly reports. Your privacy will be maintained in any published scholarly papers resulting from this research and no company names or personal names will be released. The reports will identify each survey respondent by a number and initials.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary. Other than having an opportunity to talk to an interested other about your personal opinions and experiences, there is little personal benefit to you for being part of this research project. A potential risk associated with the study is that survey questions could lead you to feel uncomfortable about being asked to express your opinion. Remember you are free not to answer any question.

If you are recommending a computer scientist or engineer for this study, or if you are a participant in this study, you will be asked to provide the names of other potential subjects. You have the right to decline to provide this information. Please be sure you have interested potential subjects contact the PI directly at sarah.blithe@colorado.edu and do not reveal their names without the recommended participant's permission.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background Information

1. How do you describe your occupation to others?
2. How did you come to be a _____?
3. What is it like to work in _____(computer science, engineering or academia)?
4. What is your biggest occupational challenge?
5. What makes you successful in your work?
6. What makes people unsuccessful in your type of work?
7. What are important characteristics of people in your line of work?
8. What don't you like about your job?

Leave Experiences

1. What is your company's policy for leaves of absence?
2. How do you know?
3. Who handles the logistics of taking leave?
4. Did anyone talk to you about the option to take a leave?
5. Is your company covered under FMLA?
6. Do you know a male coworker take a leave of absence?
    a. Why did he take leave?
    b. How long did he take leave?
    c. What was your feeling about his leave?
    d. How did coworkers talk about his leave?
    e. How do you think management felt about his leave?
    f. Why?
7. Have you ever taken a leave of absence from work?
    a. How long was your leave of absence?
    b. Why did you take a leave?
    c. Did you feel supported in your decision to take a leave?
    d. Why or why not?
    e. Would you take a leave of absence again?
    f. Would you recommend taking a leave of absence to a friend in the same company?
8. Was there ever a time that you thought about taking a leave, or would have qualified for a leave of absence but did not take it?

Perceptions of Leave

1. For what reasons do people take leaves of absence?
2. How long can/do leaves of absence last?
3. Why don't men take leaves of absence as often as women?
4. Are there reasons that are more acceptable than others for men to take leave?

Balance

1. What does balance mean to you?
2. What would you do if you had more free time?
3. What is in the life part of work–life?
4. Do you feel you have achieved “balance”
5. Is there anything about tech that would be helpful to know in a study of work–life balance?

Final Questions

1. How would you describe your identity in relation to the major social categories?
2. If you feel comfortable, will you forward my recruitment email to peers who you believe might be interested in participating in this study?

APPENDIX D

COMPANIES INCLUDED IN STUDY

1. EMC
2. Western Digital
3. Fluor
4. KBR
5. Peter Kiewit & Sons
6. Jacobs Engineering Group
7. URS
8. Shaw Group
9. AECOM Technology
10. CH2M Hill
11. Boeing
12. United Technologies
13. Lockheed Martin
14. Northrop Grumman
15. Honeywell International
16. General Dynamics
17. Raytheon
18. L-3 Communications
19. ITT
20. Textron
21. Goodrich
22. Precision Castparts
23. Alliant Technology Systems
24. Rockwell Collins
25. Microsoft
26. Oracle
27. Symantec
28. Cognizant Technology Solutions
29. Booz Allen Hamilton Holdings
30. SAIC
31. Computer Sciences
32. International Business Machines
33. Jabil Circuit
34. Intel
35. Texas Instruments
36. Microsoft
37. Apple
38. Google
39. Intel
40. Hewlett Packard